STUDIES in ENGLISH DRAMA and POETRY

VOL. 3

READING SUBVERSION AND TRANSGRESSION

WYDAWNICTWO
UNIWERSYTETU
ŁÓDZKIEGO

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Volume editors
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Studies in English Drama and Poetry

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The series, *Studies in English Drama and Poetry*, developed and launched by the Department of Studies in Drama and pre-1800 English Literature at the University of Łódź, offers a forum for the discussion of literary texts, performance and production issues, as well as methodological approaches to drama and poetry. Central to the design and organisation of the series is its focus on interdisciplinary research and current theoretical discourses on literature written in English. Inviting contributions covering a broad range of topics and adopting a variety of critical perspectives, from readings of individual texts to interrogations of literary theories and artistic movements, books in the series, aimed at scholars and practitioners working in the fields of English, media studies, drama, and theatre, will present research currently produced within Polish academia as well as that carried out abroad.

Introduction

Subversion and transgression are by no means fixed concepts that remain unchanged in universal contexts. While in their basic understanding both are underpinned by the existence of boundaries, such as those dictated by law, religion or politics, they go against normative limitations and destabilize them either by explicit violation or implicit sabotage. The almost symbiotic relationship between prescribed standards and acts of transgression reveals tensions that underlie cultural conventions, social habits or economic assumptions, and brings to light the duality of the world and human nature. Interconnections between literature and transgression as well as subversion are deep-seated and, ironically, time-honoured through the acceptance of once anarchic or revolutionary writings into the canon. Positioned relationally, literary texts always refer to values and hierarchies while the language of literature, as an act of organized violence, undermines habitual thinking and human longing for permanence and stability. Subversive desires which work through theme, genre or language, challenge dominant discourses, oppose the tyranny of finite ideologies and redistribute power.

The third volume in this series explores, contests and celebrates these entanglements between literature and violations of power. Transgressive in its own right, it goes beyond the boundaries of genres, languages and cultural contexts, and offers analyses of diverse texts, from Middle English theatre to contemporary American fiction. In an anti-transgressive vein, however, the contributions are grouped in three categories unified by generic commonalities and are arranged thematically rather than chronologically.

Transgression and subversion in play and performance are focal points of **Part One**, **Reading Subversion and Transgression in Drama**. Essays collected in this section tease and tame issues of law and justice, geography and politics, as well as natural thought and science in dramatic writings spanning the period from the late Middle Ages to the early twenty first century. Gender as an important conceptual field of cultural, social and philosophical rebellion often underlies the texture of several contributions in this part.

Discursive determinants of gender roles are discussed in Estella Ciobanu's "Staging Transgression Stories in the Later Middle Ages: Divine Fiat, Truth and Justice in the N-Town Play of the Annunciation." Using theoretical perspectives of Michel Foucault, Lorna Weir, Diane Prosser and Michel de Certeau, Ciobanu investigates the transgressive nature of the Annunciation play in the N-Town cycle. She argues that the pageant exposes the working of the Christian truth regime and enhances the power of the authoritarian system by staging authorized divine transgression. Tomasz Wiącek's "Legal and Social Discourse of

Matrimony in Selected N-Town Cycle Plays" continues the theme of the legal, cultural and theological power of the Annunciation pageants. Wiącek views these plays as an attempt to solidify the legal status of marriage by transgressing, and then upholding, the sanctity of the union between Joseph and Mary, and stresses the exemplary nature of subversion that serves to reinforce Christian dogma.

Although placed in a different context – that of the pre-revolutionary Continent – law and order is also explored in Lucía Bodas Fernández's analysis of Friedrich Schiller's debut play, *The Robbers*. Her essay, "Freedom above the Law: Friedrich Schiller's *Die Räuber*," is particularly interested in the noble criminal who, by resisting the dominant system, exposes the oppressive nature of the enlightenment. Bodas Fernández uses Hammer and Hart's Gadamerian literary hermeneutics to present the Schillerian critique of the ethics that challenges the autonomy of an individual.

In his "Geographic Transgression and Epic Theatre: The Subversiveness of the Pastoral Idyll in Edward Bond's *Lear*," Andreas Schardt counters claims that the pastoral has lost its appeal and postulates that it has become a subversive space which offers a perspective on the predicament of modern life. Schardt investigates those elements that encompass both the pastoral mode and the epic theatre in Bond's *Lear*, arguing that the two enhance the subversive and transgressive nature of the play. Geographical dislocation that endeavours to overthrow cultural assumptions is also explored in Michał Lachman's article, "Seeking out Strangeness: Tony Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul*." Lachman reads the re-discovery of identity by Kushner's characters as a sign of cultural transgression which is made doubly difficult by the obduracy of the Western mind-set. His search for the everyday and the ordinary discloses the power of the individual who battles – and, ostensibly, wins – with hegemonic discourses, narratives and ideas. In "The Silencing of Dissent: Harold Pinter's Bleak Political Vision," Paulina Mirowska demonstrates Pinter's apparent lack of belief in any lasting and meaningful transpositions of power. She highlights inherent inequalities of power depicted by the dramatist and shows that Pinter's humour, although theatrically effective, is by no means light as it uncovers the ever-present oppression of sociopolitical structures.

The duality of the physical world and the relativity of human contact are at the centre of Jadwiga Uchman's "Quantum Mechanics and the Relativity of Human Identity: Tom Stoppard's *Hapgood*." Her analysis of Stoppard's fascination with physics identifies contradictions and tensions in a world that is split and dichotomous in its basic principle, exposing the fluidity of human nature. Science, or more specifically mathematics, also has a special place in Tomasz Wiśniewski's interrogation of Complicite's 2007 production, "The Mathematics in a Dramatic Text – *A Disappearing Number* by Complicite." Wiśniewski delves into correlations between mathematics and literature, and

postulates that the force that drives them both is that of the imagination. His discussion of the play-text reveals intersemiotic aspects of dramatic writings, highly important in Complicite's theatrical practice.

The final three essays in this section are thematically united by their interest in gender and the female experience. Transgressive acts perpetuated by the senses are the main subject of Monika Sosnowska's venture into the world of Elsinore, "Sensory Transgression: Literary Representations of Women's Sight and Hearing in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*." Sosnowska explores the imagery of visual and auditory stimuli in the drama, drawing a parallel between the sensory experience in the play and the textual coding of it. This correspondence reveals gender-based differences in the accessibility to the senses in the early modern period. Dagmara Krzyżaniak's "The Nature of Contemporary Catharsis in Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats…*" interprets the audience's cathartic experience facilitated by late twentieth-century drama as a mechanism not unlike that encouraged in psychotherapy and aimed at instigating behavioural change. Based on Carr's play, Krzyżaniak underlines the affective power of contemporary theatre and articulates the need for a re-interpretation of the traditional understanding of the Aristotelian concept. An examination of conservative and revolutionary parody, "Gender/Genre Disruption in Bryony Lavery's *Her Aching Heart*," by Edyta Lorek-Jezińska closes Part One. Lorek-Jezińska considers the role of lesbian drama in reconfiguring the convention of romance and tests its capacity to formulate alternative dramaturgy. She reads binary oppositions, as represented in the play, as an endeavour to stage a woman-to-woman homoerotic bonding that breaks cultural stereotypes attached to same-sex relationships.

Part Two of the volume, **Reading Subversion and Transgression in Poetry**, addresses the transgressive power of verse forms. This section tries to defy fixed meanings in poetic creation and to come to terms with its open-endedness which embraces the multiplicity and depth of meaning. Rory McTurk's article, "Tolkien's *Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún*: Creative Drama or Scholarly Exercise?" reads Tolkien's poem as dialogic eddic poetry composed of exchanges between fictional characters, thus resembling drama. McTurk scrutinizes similarities and differences in related verses in Faroese, Middle High German and Old Norse writings as part of his discussion of the textual strategies adopted by Tolkien in *The Legend*. He brings to the fore the conflict between Tolkien's scholarly desires and his creative drive, evident in the structure of the poem. Monika Kocot's "Transgressing the Normative in Edwin Morgan's 'Message Clear'" presents a close analysis of the poem, which she interprets through James Joyce's idea of verbivocovisuality. Kocot looks into the morphodynamics of Morgan's poem and speculates upon the Derridean concept of language seen as a philosophy of living that can be deconstructed and perceived as freeplay.

Part Three, **Reading Subversion and Transgression in Prose**, focuses on prose writings spanning the period from the late Middle Ages to the final years of the twentieth century. It looks into the texts that are transgressive through their content and through their form or genre in English and American literature, thus bridging the Old World and the New World.

Jacek Kowzan's "The Rite-of-Passage Structure in Medieval and Early Modern Visionary Accounts" examines the transformative experience of visiting the otherworld in pre-modern and early modern writings. Kowzan uses Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner's notion of the rite of passage to propose a reading of religious visions which he interprets as liminal occurrences. Analyzing their internal structure, Kowzan suggests that the transgressive experience of an individual serves a socially important function of consolidating the community. The main interest in Agnieszka Łowczanin's "Damsels and Demons: Transgressive Females from Clarissa to Carmilla" lies in eighteenth-century and gothic fictional heroines whose rebellious nature allows them to gain personal and economic freedom. Łowczanin follows the development of strong, transgressive women who begin to pose a threat to the oppressive regime of Victorian patriarchy. She also investigates the role of sexuality in undermining Victorian male dominance and respectability. In "The Discourse of Orientalism in C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*," Andrzej Wicher uses Edward Said's concept of the other to explore C. S. Lewis's attitude towards the cultures of the East, or, more specifically, the Middle East. Wicher tackles the representation of "things and people" Arabic and Jewish in *The Chronicles of Narnia* in an attempt to untangle the intricate texture of culturally determined stereotypes. Małgorzata Janik's "Subversive Form, Provocative Content and Truth at All Costs: Liberature of B. S. Johnson" provides a survey of literary works of B. S. Johnson. Janik applies the concept of liberature, total – liberated – literature, to discuss his prose writings and draws on the introduction to *Aren't You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs?* to give an overview of the development of Johnson's literary career.

Anna Krawczyk-Łaskarzewska's "Smilers, Defilers, Reekers and Leakers"– Dogs as Tools of Subversion and Transgression in Short Stories by Edgar A. Poe, Mark Twain and Ambrose Bierce" centres on the transgressive potential of three satirical texts. Featuring dogs as their main themes, the stories offer, as Krawczyk-Łaskarzewska observes, a commentary on the limits of subversion in Western culture. She argues that the combination of cynicism and idealism, although not always recognized by the authors' contemporaries, manages to engage twenty-first century readers, eager to negotiate the boundaries of their experience. "Great Expectations: Incest and Incompleteness in Kathy Acker's *Blood and Guts in High School*," Mark Tardi's contribution, focuses on a novel that is transgressive through its violence and explicit sexual content. As Tardi

notes, the effectiveness of the subversive power of the text depends on the emotional energy of the reader, yet the novel's structural inevitabilities and lack of tonal variation undermine the social critique propounded by Acker. The article closing the volume, Katarzyna Więckowska's "Brief Interviews with Liminality: The Case of David Foster Wallace," offers a critical look at the threshold moment in the history of literature. Więckowska examines Wallace's writings as examples of texts that, while described as postmodern and metafictional, seek to overcome the limitations of their own techniques and devices. She unmasks Wallace's attempts to engage critically with the postmodern form and to identify layers of self-awareness underlying his creative work.

Like any kind of collective work, this book owes much to those whose help we received during its preparation. We are particularly indebted to Professor Łukasz Bogucki, Head of the Institute of English Studies, University of Łódź, for his generosity which made the publication of this volume possible. Our special thanks also go to Leonora Wojciechowska, Łódź University Press, for her kind and patient advice on technical issues relating to the typesetting process. We are also greatly indebted to Jane Hunt, University Centre, Doncaster, for informative comments and helpful assistance concerning language questions.

Joanna Kazik
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Part One
Reading Subversion and Transgression in Drama

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Staging Transgression Stories in the Later Middle Ages: Divine Fiat, Truth and Justice in the N-Town Play of the Annunciation

Abstract: The Middle English Annunciation plays dramatise a heterological encounter whose stakes, Mary's willing collaboration with God in the salvific project, can be brought to bear on both the Christian meta-narrative and the condition of women in late medieval Western society. Despite their edifying thrust, however, the Annunciation plays also stage transgression by referencing or intimating a breach of law, whose more overt forms range from recounting the story of Adam and Eve's transgression of the divine commandment, coded in theological discourse as original sin, to the enactment of the Incarnation as transgression of natural law by divine fiat, an authorised transgression (Prosser) implicitly coded as transcendence and dramatised in the N-Town Play 11 in a spectacular stage direction with a heavy dogmatic burden.

I use the notions of truth regimes (Foucault) and truth formulae (Weir) to investigate the play's less obvious unauthorised transgression (Prosser), manifest in the implicit interrogation of the Christian truth regime, i.e., the Lucan and Incarnational orthodoxy grounding the script, as it emerges from the divine debate on human redemption. Furthermore, reading the N-Town heavenly parliament with Anselm of Canterbury's *Cur Deus Homo* points out the entanglements of kyriarchal truth regimes in power and the ensuing violence of representation (Armstrong and Tennenhouse). I argue that the play's brief suggestion that the deity is overly revengeful appears itself transgressive of both contemporary theology and the secular *ordo*. This secondary discourse – a form of glossolalia (Certeau) – not only disrupts the naturalisation of human justice modelled on divine self-consistency but also intimates the self-legitimising drive of patriarchal discourses of worldly *auctoritas*.

The Middle English plays of the Annunciation dramatise a heterological encounter[1] whose stakes, a woman's willing collaboration with the deity for the redemption of humanity (cf. Lk. 1.26–38), could be brought to bear on the Christian meta-narrative at large. On the face of it, the fifteenth-century N-Town play *The Parliament of Heaven; The Salutation and Conception*[2] and other

[1] I use the term "heterological" to denote encounters with the Other as studied by Michel de Certeau, here specifically the human–divine encounter between the Virgin Mary and archangel Gabriel as the emissary of the Godhead. Certeau's heterological studies implicitly address a power differential conducive to the differential possibility of knowledge.

[2] The N-Town plays are perhaps the most puzzling collection of drama compiled in medieval England, whose provenance and performance auspices are still a matter of indeterminacy as any overview of the literature (Gibson; Fletcher; Sugano) will show. A manuscript collection of

English plays on the topic highlight Mary's ancillary readiness to be instrumental in the divine plan,[3] contingent upon what theological discourse deemed one of the most mysterious ways of the Lord (I use the word advisedly) and which medieval drama brought to the fore: the Incarnation.

It would seem counterintuitive, therefore, to argue that such a play could at the same time stage transgression. However, transgression stories – referencing or suggesting a breach of law – do appear. On the one hand, the Lucan Annunciation story ushers in the project of undoing the effects of the original transgression, coded as sin, which all English Annunciation plays unfailingly mention. Nonetheless, the very Incarnation occurs through God's and, by divine fiat, Mary's transgression of natural law – divinely appointed to separate mortals from the Godhead – in a discourse that scripts and stages the event as God-decreed and prophetically announced to the humans.[4] On the other hand, the N-Town Play 11[5] appears itself transgressive when the dialogue of the characters

booklets whose compilation by an educated scribe probably started in 1468, the N-Town plays evolved in several stages – where the second layer, the devotional *Mary Play*, includes the Annunciation play – and then was revised slightly later by two other scribes. I use here the text and line numbering of the N-Town Play 11 in Douglas Sugano, based on Stephen Spector's critical edition, *The N-Town Play: Cotton MS Vespasian D.8* (1991); the spelling, however, follows Gerard NeCastro's version. I have accordingly retained the Middle English characters "þ" (thorn, cf. modern "th") and "ȝ" (yogh, cf. modern "gh" or "y"), as well as the dialectal (East Anglian) "x" (cf. modern "sh") in the modal verb "shall." Quotations from plays, including the other three English mystery cycles, identify the collection by abbreviation: *NT* for *N-Town*, *Y* for *York*, *C* for *Chester*, T for *Towneley*, followed by the play's number in the edition cited and then the line number(s).

[3] All the English plays' (intertextual) web of doctrinal explication regarding the necessity and conditions of possibility of the Incarnation corresponds to a gospel narrative which ends with Mary's meek submission to the heavenly decree, a role, however, that had already been devised for her by divine fiat, as prophecy shows (Isa. 7.14), and earlier still, in the creation of Eve as Adam's *adiutorium* (Gen. 2.18), viz. "help" (*Douay-Rheims*) or "helper" (*New King James Version*), for womankind. In the N-Town play more compellingly than in the other Annunciation plays, Gabriel instructs Mary that the Godhead is depending on her active assent (*NT* 11.285–88): not only is the salvific plan a matter of collaboration but Mary is expected – cf. abydyth (264), both anxiously waited for and intended – to act in accordance with the divine design (261–64). For all its dramatic context with a strong theological inflection, the script's use of "entent" (*NT* 11.262; *MED*, s.v. "entente") – by Gabriel, to reference Mary's position – is imbued with the legalistic force of the contractual relation envisaged in the embassy to Mary.

[4] Such blatant transgression is understated in theological discourse and the Annunciation plays as the impossibility that a virgin should give birth, duly poised against undeniable divine omnipotence (cf. Lk. 1.37). The Annunciation narrative, therefore, subtly re-codes this form of transgression as transcendence: as both virgin mother and the only one human to be assumed bodily to heavens upon "dormition" to be exalted as heavenly Queen, Mary has sublimely transcended her mortal lot. By comparison, Elijah (2 Kings 2.11) and Enoch (Gen. 5.24; Heb. 11.5), also assumed into heaven, yet before death, are in no other way exceptional bodily.

[5] Titles have been added to the N-Town plays, in this case *Parliament of Heaven, Salutation and Annunciation*, by the editor Stephen Spector. The episode of the heavenly parliament of Play

embodying divine traits implicitly interrogates the Christian truth regime and its imbrication in power.

A brief introduction of my major theoretical leanings is paramount before I look at the double articulation of the plot and analyse the heavenly parliament as discursive transgression. One aspect of transgression which I address is what in a different context Diane Prosser calls a "transgression of language" (3), i.e., stepping beyond the linguistic constraints embedded in different types of discourse and thereby dangerously blurring their boundaries, here the theological and dramatic discourses. However, transgression behaviour and biblical stories thereof are coded linguistically in a circular definition: they are identified (textualised) as infraction of the law, the law itself pre-existing its breach, e.g., the Adamic sin (Gen. 2–3), or, alternatively, being constituted in its wake, e.g., Cain's fratricide (Gen. 4). I adopt Prosser's concepts of "authorised" and "unauthorised transgression" (2–4, 14–15) to harness their paradox-ridden force, respectively to explicate the drama of the Incarnation in the Virgin's body in a phallogocentric theology "girded in structures of oppressive relations" (Prosser 14) and to capture the theological as well as social doubts expressed in the language of stage drama.

My discussion of the N-Town characters Truth and Justice reads the corresponding Middle English concepts with Michel Foucault's notion of "truth regimes." Foucault uses "truth" to refer not to content but to the rules ascertaining the assignment of truth value to statements, subject to contentious negotiations whereby "the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true" (132). Arguably, truth as "a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements" (Foucault 133) is a general condition of the formation and development not only of politico-economic regimes but also of religious systems, as the history of the fight for orthodoxy in medieval Christendom proves. In her emendation to the Foucauldian notion, Lorna Weir contends that a truth regime mediates reality by means of "truth formulae": "how things are made to appear, how they come to be represented, and how the relation between things and words is formulated" (368).[6]

If truth regimes and truth formulae collude with power to mediate reality, then there is ample room for misrepresentation. In arguing this, I take my cue

11 is not mentioned at all in the Banns (157–69) attached at some point during the compilation of the N-Town plays to describe their content. Evidence of the plays' renumbering suggests that the Banns' later revision intended, though unsuccessfully, to accommodate the Marian material newly added to the play (Sugano).

[6] Truth formulae can be used heuristically. Weir proposes, to "distinguish *differing* types of truth: veridical, governmental, symbolical, and mundane" (369; emphasis added). Such heuristic use is paramount to an investigation of medieval drama as an arena of dynamic intersections of discourses, from conflicting or emerging truth games to the intersection of discourses and natural bodies.

from Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse's contention that what is often represented as violence may conceal "violence of representation":

> [Violence] which is "out there" in the world . . . [is] opposed to that which is exercised through words upon things in the world, often by attributing violence to them. But . . . the two cannot in fact be distinguished, at least not in writing. . . . [V]iolent events are not simply so but are called violent because they bring together different concepts of social order. (Armstrong and Tennenhouse 9)

Accordingly, interpretation should be aware of how "representations . . . suppress the emergence of their own discursive power where fiction reveals it" (Armstrong and Tennenhouse 9) so as not to replicate the discursive strategies of the texts and context under scrutiny.

Unlike the Flood or Passion plays, the English Annunciation plays thematise anything but overt violence; nonetheless, their faithful rendition of the Lucan story is complicit in the age's politics of "en-gendering" (cf. de Lauretis 240)[7] social hierarchy and legitimising patriarchal injustice as God-sanctioned. The specific "battle about the truth" (Foucault 132) in the English Annunciation plays and its staging as transgression in the N-Town Play 11 offer a glimpse into the violence of representing Mary – and by implication women – as agentive in a narrative of kyriarchal[8] imposition of gender roles.[9]

Since in N-Town the typical grounding of the Annunciation plays' Incarnation in the grand plan of salvation[10] hinges upon the heavenly parliament,

[7] According to Teresa de Lauretis (240–45), violence is not only engendered in representation as violence of representation, but it is specifically created along gender lines, "en-gendered," since within the enunciative modality constructed by Western phallogocentrism theoretical pronouncements are always already assumed to be made by a male(-sexed) subject.

[8] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has coined the terms "kyriarchy," "kyriocentrism," "kyriarchal" so as to designate the patriarchal system of domination, itself mediated by andro-kyriocentric (male-master dominated) language, without assuming merely gender dualism (11n28, 14n31). As an analytic category, kyriarchy "articulates a more comprehensive systemic analysis of empire, in order to underscore the complex interstructuring of domination, and to locate sexism and misogyny in the political matrix – or better, 'patrix' – of a broader range of dominations" (14n31).

[9] The scope of this paper does not allow me to address issues of medieval drama authorship. Despite their heavy religious burden, the English biblical cycles "encode the piety of people rather than that of clerics" (Clopper 169); although "the clerical voice is apparent to varying degrees in the extant texts," it "does not systematically promote" the current clerical educational agenda for the laity to which it responds (208, 210), since the "dramas tend toward the eschatological and apocalyptic but primarily are penitential" (210). Such penitential issues, however, were addressed in accordance with a patriarchal Christian discourse whose dual ontology and gender-biased positive prescriptions have often been remarked but which Clopper overlooks completely.

[10] In certain plays this is achieved through a rehearsal of God's intent (*T* 10.17–75; *NT* 11.33–213); in others, an intermediary expositor figure plays the same role (*Y* 12.1–144). The

the play is uniquely positioned to address the mechanics of the kyriarchal retributive logic newly refashioned as redemptive. Unlike the other Annunciation plays, N-Town features a multilayered framing system which is self-validating: its core, the Annunciation, illuminates as well as fulfilling the first episode of the heavenly parliament, itself preceded by Contemplacio's prologue, a speech which provides the theological and intercessory framework for the Incarnation in a circular argument.[11]

Two details in the Annunciation episode are salient for my investigation: a stage direction calling for the spectacular enactment of the mystery of conception (*NT* 11.292) and a juridical term (304) used by Mary immediately afterwards. The theatrical truth formula mediating the Incarnational doctrine in the stage direction overwrites the theologically sanctioned equation of divinity and light with the Marian Theotokos dogma[12]:

> *Here þe Holy Gost discendit with iij bemys to oure Lady, the Sone of þe Godhed nest with iij bemys to þe Holy Gost, the Fadyr godly with iij bemys to þe Sone. And so entre all thre to here bosom.* (*NT* 11.292)
>
> Here the Holy Ghost descends with three beams to Our Lady, the Son of the Godhead next with three beams to the Holy Ghost, and the Father Godly with three beams to the son, and so enter all three into her bosom.[13]

Unsurprisingly, immediately prior to this moment Gabriel exalts Mary as the lantern of light (292), viz. the Chōra – receptacle and container – of Christ-the-Light-of-the-World (Jn. 8.12, 9.5).

Chester "wrightes playe" starts its composite plot with the Salutation and Annunciation episode (*C* 6.1–48), which is announced in the Sybil's prophecy and by portents that the Expositor explains to the audience.

[11] Such circularity of argument was indebted to the Christian theologians' hermeneutic emphasis upon typology or prefigurement in the structure of the Bible (Auerbach).

[12] The ecumenical council Ephesus III (431 CE) proclaimed that as Christotokos ("the Bearer/Mother of Christ"), Mary was also Theotokos ("the Mother of God"), a doctrine endorsed by the Council of Chalcedon (451) in the definition of Christ's two natures in one person, viz. the hypostatic union (Placher 83–84). However, the very Theotokos dispute in the early Church arguably addressed not so much Mary, the woman whose body made the Incarnation possible, but abstractly and sublimely Jesus' dual nature beyond the implications of corporeality proper.

[13] Though theologically overembodied, the conception (*NT* 11.292, stage direction) creatively overlays the Johannine *ego lux in mundum veni* ("I am come, a light into the world"; *Douay-Rheims*, Jn. 12.46), with the Nicene-Constantinople creedal doctrine of *filioque* stating the procession of the Holy Ghost from both the Father and the Son (Schaff 65–67). The stage effects may have struck the spectators with an overwhelming suggestion of light-cum-power that persuaded them to devotion, as the critics rightly insist, yet in every sense must have overpowered both Mary and vicariously women in the audience.

Mary's speech describing the bliss of conception (*NT* 11.293–309) provides yet another truth formula, which illuminates the overall legalistic framework of the play.[14] During her scholarly espousal of Chalcedonian/Athanasian orthodoxy (cf. Schaff 62–63, 69), Mary prays to God for a special prerogative for her baby by virtue of his special paternity: "It is worthy ȝoure son now my son haue a prerogatyff" (*NT* 11.304). Encompassing as it does both the notion of a special right and its beneficiary (*MED*, s.v. "prērogātīf"), the play's usage of *prerogatyff* is consistent with the medieval juridical compass of the term, yet in so doing it obliterates the role of power differentials in defining the prerogative: as the *MED* entry (s.v. "prērogātīf") wryly suggests, the primary sense of "prerogative" denotes "the absolute discretionary power possessed by a royal personage, a sovereign right, royal prerogative." What the entry does not mention is that this absolute discretionary power, implicitly the flip-point of tyranny, is delimited vis-à-vis God's in a circular definition which begs identifying the source of this privilege and how it disenfranchises others. Once envisaged as a salient theological descriptor of the deity, whether in the N-Town play or anywhere in medieval discourse, as in Anselm of Canterbury's *Cur Deus Homo* ("Why God Became Man" [1099]; hereafter *CDH*), "prerogative" can implicitly be deployed to ground and legitimise all types of special rights practically exclusively as a male preserve.

The truth formulae encapsulated in the two phrases above illustrate the incipient constitution of a new truth regime already started in the parliament of heaven.[15] While its unfolding is illustrative of the medieval construal of order as hierarchy (cf. Duby), the parliament is hardly an exclusive landmark for the heavenly realm and the tenuous decision-making regarding human salvation. At stake is the propriety of showing mercy to a fallen humanity damned to eternal punishment, debated by several divine and spiritual characters: Virtutes (the "Virtues," an angelic order), the Psalmic four daughters of God, viz. Veritas ("Truth"), Misericordia ("Mercy"), Justicia ("Righteousness"), Pax ("Peace"),[16]

[14] Ambiguously close to intimating orgasmic bliss though it is, the painless bliss which Mary describes to Gabriel after being overshadowed by the Holy Ghost (*NT* 11.305–06) is anticipated by Spiritus Sanctus and moreover offered as a token of truth telling (211–12) in a truth game that will not only reveal the truthfulness of prior discourse, viz. the vetero-testamentary prophecies of the coming of the Messiah, but also radically alter the truth regime by which the faithful are to abide if they are to earn their salvation.

[15] It has become apparent by now that Mary is merely the mouthpiece of the clerical/patriarchal malestream and that she is made to comply meekly with anything decreed for her to do. This comes, ironically, in accordance with the meaning of the Middle English noun *parlemente* played up in Stephen Spector's title, which suggests as much the debate the spectators are privy to and the *man*-made institution within the English body politic responsible for decision-making.

[16] A widespread occurrence in Christian literature, the debate between the four daughters of God – Truth, Mercy, Justice and Peace – derives from Psalm 85 (*NKJV*).

and the Godhead, viz. Pater ("God the Father"), Filius ("the Son") and Spiritus Sanctus ("the Holy Ghost"). First Virtues and later Mercy intercede with God the Father on behalf of humans for "mercy" (*NT* 11.40, 47, 75–80), to the discomfiture of Truth and Justice. The Virtues' petition to God to have pity on His creature (43, 46), now repentant (44), immediately meets with a favourable answer, which is symptomatic of the play's penchant for highlighting a preordained state: God's speech opens with a quote from the *Vulgate* Psalm 11.5 (*NKJV*, Ps. 12.5), followed by the English version thereof (48a–c, 49–51), to proclaim that "Tyme is come of reconsyliacyon" (52). However, as Truth challenges God's decision to annul His early sentence, Mercy immediately intercedes for the salvation of humanity, only to stir Justice to side with Truth: not only does Justice rebuke Mercy for the "abhomynabyl presumpcyon" (98) that the reputed (99) "ryghtwysnes of God hath no diffynicyon ("limits")" (100), but she moreover avers that humanity cannot be redeemed. Countering Justice's self-definition with her own, to the effect that "The mercy of God is withowtyn ende" (112; cf. *NKJV*, Ps. 118.1–4), Mercy reprimands her sister for her revengeful disposition (105), in an exchange whose violence escalates until Peace urges the contenders to trust God's wisdom to judge the matter (124–25). God the Son intervenes to remind them, drawing implicitly on the notion of Adam's *felix culpa*, that "If Adam had not deyd" (139), the four daughters themselves would have perished (139–43); hence he envisages a second death (144) as a solution to the conundrum. Sent off into the world to seek out the one suitable for the atonement (151), the sisters look in vain (153–64) and Peace proposes that the Son should offer himself as sacrifice (165–68; cf. *CDH* 2.6). This is also the conclusion reached within the Trinity after consultations about the salvific project (169–84), to the satisfaction of all four daughters (185–86), who kiss each other in reconciliation (187–88; cf. Ps. 85.10).

Arguably, this heavenly debate about the legalistic justification of eternal punishment for Adam's sin echoes[17] the satisfaction theory first proposed by Anselm of Canterbury in *Cur Deus Homo*.[18] Though seemingly unjust (cf. *CDH*

[17] I do not argue any direct influence of *Cur Deus Homo* on the N-Town Play 11, but simply suggest that Anselmian ideas could gradually be mediated to the laity through homilies. Ellen Ross briefly points to this play's "Anselmian portrayal" of God (82), but she does not develop this insight beyond identifying a "theme of juridical sacrifice" in the N-Town and York plays (84), with no comment on the juridical dimension. Likewise, possibly under the spell of Rosemary Woolf's optimistic remark about "God's burning love" in this play (qtd. in Ross 82), Ross explains away the import of vengefulness when she notes that Mercy "remind[s] her vengeful sister, Righteousness, that the eternal God may rectify eternal sin" (82).

[18] The Anselmian theory of satisfaction in *Cur Deus Homo* – undergirded by a "retributive logic" (Gorringe 369) – unfolds as an implicit polemic between the "character" Anselm and the infidels, whose "advocate" is Boso, a fellow Benedictine monk. The debt to God incurred by the sinner for a certain transgression is seemingly incommensurate because he or she needs to make

1.7, 1.10, 1.12), eternal punishment should be retained (*NT* 11.57–72, 89–104), argue Truth and Justice; only pursuing the original retributive politics will ensure, Veritas contends, that "thy trewthe, Lord, xal leste withowtyn ende" (65). Veritas ultimately claims that God should not reconsider His former decision so as to stay true to Himself forever – "to thine own self be true," as Polonius would say (*Hamlet* I.3.78). I would argue that the argument between Veritas, Justicia and Misericordia offers a painful insight into the undecidability, even cruelty, of truth and justice in the Christian doctrine of atonement and redemption.[19] *Whose* truth and righteousness (justice) do the characters called Veritas/Trewth and Justicia/Ryghtwysnes embody? The issue is all the more urgent to address as the Son presents the solution in a speech opening with God's words in Jeremiah's prophetic letter to Israel, captive in Babylon (Jer. 29.11): "I thynke þe thoughtys of pes ("peace") and nowth ("not") of wykkydnes" (*NT* 11.137). Is the N-Town quotation a foreboding nod to the captivity of Mary, viz. Mary as an always already compliant participant as staged in the grand narrative of redemption-through-cosmic-transgression, or rather to the narrative of societal rules and regulations that the script's divine attributes are made *ad imaginem*?

Middle English "truth" (*MED*, s.v. "treuth") denotes primarily not factual truth, which is mostly rendered by "soth" (*MED*, s.v. "sōth"), but rather the social circumstances of acting in accordance with certain aspects of the self-relation deemed positive at the time. In fact, "truth" refashions the *other*-relation as *self*-relation, specifically as concordance with a principle or (one's) essence.[20] Accordingly, when the four daughters of God debate the opportunity for revoking the punishment for the Adamic sin, the N-Town play appears to evoke "truth" as an impartial administration of justice that plays out God's fidelity to His divine essence. This notion is reinforced by the Middle English noun "justice" (*MED*, s.v. "justīce"), whose circular logic identifies the socially-bound other-relation as ultimately signalling one's conformity with the law, on the template of the divine attribute of righteousness or justness. Nonetheless, like

restitution for having robbed God of His honour (*CDH* 1.11.4–10); the metaphysical "size-gap" between God and creatures is thus used to measure the seriousness of sin.

[19] A basically similar contention about self-truth as identity appears in the Chester *Last Judgement*, where the blessed are separated from the damned and the latter are claimed by the demons in accordance with the Christic promise, quoted by the First Demon (*C* 24.573–80, 580 stage direction): should Christ deny the demons their prey, he will prove to be as false and unrighteous as they, the demons, are (565–66, 571–72).

[20] "Truth" (*MED*, s.v. "treuth") redefines the *other*-relation as fundamentally a *self*-relation, from constant allegiance, loyalty, devotion, a pledge thereof, and/or its performance under specific circumstances, to integrity in the performance of one's job, rectitude of character, the vaguely defined social virtue of trustworthiness and divine righteousness reified as a flesh and blood character, and likewise from the state of being innocent of an offence to the execution of judgement, the principle of justice and the quality of impartiality; it also defines statements, from factual statement to the codifying of a set of beliefs and to the assertion of the Christian faith as *the* Truth.

"treuth," "rightwisnesse"[21] and "wikkednes,"[22] "justice" has its underside: it denotes (the act of) punishment, vengeance, retribution, thus signalling its connection with power in its destructive dimension. In openly articulating the view of a violent other-relation – so different from the modern sanitised position – while also vindicating violence within a retributive logic allegedly divinely originated, the terms deployed in the script downplay the violence of representing the sources of juridical violence and proffer instead a representation of violent justice as "fair play."

The N-Town script does not openly warrant an interpretation of God the Father as the vetero-testamentary Yahweh (cf. *NT* 11.52),[23] or rather it does not implicate it any more than Middle English polysemy and medieval discursive practices do. Theologians throughout the Middle Ages painstakingly explicated the necessity of eternal infernal expiation for a time-bound transgression,[24] as the

[21] Rightwisnesse overlaps, in its sense of "impartiality, justice, equity," "straightness," "uprightness," with rightnesse (from "right") and with rightfulnesse (from "rightful"), hence the "ryghtwysnes"–"ryghtffulnes" pairing in the play (*NT* 11.90–91). Like "right," rightwisnesse ("righteousness") covers the territory of justice and morality, of prerogatives as much as of duties, of fairness yet also of the administration of (just) punishment, hence its coding as a cardinal virtue, viz. equity, probity, and its use as a descriptor of God, especially of divine justice (*MED*, s.v. "right-wīsnes(se," "rightnesse," "rightfulnes(se," "right").

[22] The medieval commingling of the now separate notions of morally evil conduct and punishment in wikkednesse (*MED*, s.v. "wikkednes(se") recalls the vetero-testamentary instances of human trials and tribulations through divine fiat in the absence of inequity, for instance, the Abraham and Job test-of-faith stories of victimisation (cf. Berger 99–107).

[23] Christian theologians often articulated the theological difference between their system of belief and the Jews' as one between the Christian God of Love and a vengeful Yahweh. However, feeling the need for an explanation to the Judaeo-Christian issue of divine vengeance as illustrated in the scriptural Flood, Augustine claims in his *City of God* that the wording is designed to make an impression on all categories of people so as to deter them from incurring sin (*City of God* 15.25). Or, such explanations did most likely reach the laity through preaching: John Mirk's *Festial* (c. 1382–90), a Middle English sermon collection intended to "instruct simple priests, not how to preach the word of God but to 'teach their parishioners all the main feasts that occur in the year'" and provide their liturgical explanation (Wenzel 64), points specifically to Augustine's commentary on the notion of divine vengeance. Arguing that God does not strike His trespasser but rather will show grace so as to convert the sinful, Mirk's preacher further insists: "[I]f God had done vengeance, anon the world had been ended many a day ago" (Mirk 565).

[24] Anselm was by no means the first theologian to interpret soteriology in a legalistic framework (*CDH* 1.14–15, 1.19–24). The duration of infernal chastisement for sin had been broached in both the Latin and the Byzantine Church at least ever since Origen, Clement of Alexandria and Jerome, as Pierre Batiffol shows: *apokatastasis* (or *restitutio in pristinum statum* 'restoration to the original condition'), a doctrine strongly opposed to by Augustine, envisaged the final restoration of all creatures, including the demons and lost souls, through the grace of salvation. In *The City of God* (hereafter *CG*), Augustine posits that "death is penal, and had its origin in Adam's sin" (13.2); with Cicero and the *lex talionis* (Exod. 21.24) in mind, he ponders "whether it is just that the punishments of sins last longer than the sins themselves lasted" (*CG* 21.11). Punishment for offences in the social world (*CG* 21.11) offers an argument which can be

issue of atonement was central to the religious and secular authoritative discourses, both driven by a retributive logic, yet mainstream Christian dogma cautiously jettisoned the notion of a vengeful God.[25] Still, the notion of a relentless pursuit of revenge that Veritas and Justicia advocate as divine self-consistency does sound an alarm regarding the medieval truth regime and the role of truth formulae in the construction of subjectivity and social subjects alike, as well as questioning the truth (soth) of the theological discourse of divine justice.[26]

Ironically, Stephen Spector was right to call this episode a heavenly *parliament*: the debate is orchestrated here like a court of law, hence as the classic kyriarchal institution which regulates and censors civic life, and which can accordingly impose penalties for breaches of law. In effect, some words in the parliament episode evoke the play's legalistic framework signalled by

logically extrapolated to offences to God: by appealing to the notion of the incommensurable iniquity of *contemptus*, "despising the authority of God" (14.15), Augustine can countenance the indubitable "justice of the punishment (*iusta damnatio*) with which our first parents were visited for their disobedience" (14.5). With this, he reworks the issue of "the greatness of the first transgression, on account of which eternal punishment is due to all who are not within the pale of the Saviour's grace" (21.12) to contend that, depending on the case, punishment in the afterlife may be non-purgatorial, viz. not aimed at the remission of sin (21.13).

[25] In the central and late medieval Latin Church, the discourse of a merciful, loving God was just as important a strand as that of a judgemental, punishing deity. Especially the twelfth-century Cistercians, for example, Bernard of Clairvaux, William of St Thierry, Guerric of Igny, Aelred of Rievaulx, would structure their discourse around the metaphor of "Jesus as mother" and regard both Jesus' bleeding body and the spiritual nourishment provided by his teachings as "maternal"; the Cistercian maternal metaphor always correlated, however, with the image of a traditional *pater* figure, whether God the Father or Christ-the-Judge, administering punishment for transgressions, with whom the Virgin had to intercede on behalf of the Christians (Bynum 110–69). Accordingly, such correlative images of the Godhead would reinforce and legitimize normative gender identities and roles within a patriarchal society where "the feminine in Christ or God continues to function within the male-dominated structure" (Polinska 47).

[26] Notwithstanding any self-identitary concerns in this theological construct, the issue of divine wrath with and punishment of human depravity is often articulated in Middle English drama in terms of justice/vengeance irrespective of any specific biblical chronology, as is suggested in the recurrence of "vengyd" and cognate terms, for instance "spyll." The N-Town *Noah* articulates apprehensions about divine justice-cum-vengefulness: not only do both the Noahs (*NT* 4.20–22, 29–30, 136–39, 198–205) and Noah's father Lamech (191–97) envisage divine retribution for human transgression as revenge, but, in a speech which precedes God's promise of universal destruction (94–95, 101–04), Noah teaches his sons to dread God (50–51). In fact, the wording of the divine speech (103–04), alongside the recurrence of "vengeauance" (214, 227, 235) in the survivors' post-diluvial laments, plays up the medieval conflation of views of retribution as punishment or revenge. Or, the capacity of ME "vengeance" to designate "the infliction of retributive injury" and likewise "vindictive anger" (*MED*, s.v. "venǧeaunce") intimates the tyrannical, abusive inclination of the power-wielder, also suggested in the Chester *Noah's Flood* (3.139–44) and, less conspicuously, in the York *Flood* (9.37): the will to (and asseveration of) power equals the will to destroy, even as this is the stance of the Creator, hence a self-validating authority.

Mary's use of "prerogatyff": "excepcyon" (*NT* 11.79) designates a "formal objection or protest entered by a defendant" (*MED*, s.v. "excepcioun"), while "transgressyon" (*NT* 11.77)[27] and "offendyd" (*NT* 11.92) cover any infraction of divine or human law almost interchangeably, as both can designate offence as sin (*MED*, s.v. "transgressiŏun," "offenden").

Arguably, the very medieval topos of the debate of the four daughters of God abides by a transgressive logic, since it presumptuously posits God's conflictual self-difference, dramatised as four divine attributes, rather *ad imaginem hominis*.[28] Such transgression of the implicit proposition of continuous self-consistency within the Godhead is compounded with the N-Town script's own transgression of theological decorum, when one of the four daughters, Misericordia, faults another one, Justicia, as being excessively revengeful: "Systyr Ryghtwysnes, ȝe are to vengeabyl ("too revengeful")" (105). Not only does God have a split, conflictual personality in medieval discourse, but one of the divine characters in the play is an overtly revengeful inclination, duly criticised yet finally elided, not repealed, in the event of the Incarnation. Mercy's reproach, resonant with the psalmic ring of the Son's own speech ("nowth of wykkydnes," 137), erupts much like an alternative, unruly voice, the latent "glossolalia" (Certeau)[29] of emotions able to disrupt the rational discourse of truth and justice, even though, in fact, it is but a product of calculating reason within a retributive logic. Considering, however, that the God-figure of religious drama was conceivably perceived as a role-model of uprightness and benign rulership,[30] it is remarkable that the script should have retained such disruptive lines at all, thus seemingly undoing the suppression of truth which the truth formulae deployed in the gospel and dramatic Annunciation story have painstakingly achieved.

[27] Transgression here typically alludes to the Genesis story of the forbidden fruit and its deadly consequence for humanity (Gen. 3), where, however, no name is given to the offence.

[28] God's conflictual self-difference works somewhat in the image and likeness of the Pauline split "new man," viz. the righteous Christian striving to subject the drives of the flesh to the will of God, to whom human will should submit (Eph. 4.22–24; cf. Rom. 6.6).

[29] Michel de Certeau's "Vocal Utopias: Glossolalias" addresses the drama underlying speech: (hegemonic) speech is ruptured by the secondary and embodied voice of the other. Differences in modern uses of the term notwithstanding, glossolalia is poignantly a *trompe-l'oreille* (29), a "semblance of language" that lacks the *structure* of language; the tension so engendered is being played out on the border of the self, viz. as a self–other encounter. Certeau sees glossolalia at work already when something is "push[ing] up through the cracks of ordinary conversation: bodily noises, quotations of delinquent sounds, and fragments of other's voices punctuate the order of sentences with breaks and surprises" (29). Within this corporeal disruptive intrusion upon communication, then, the "major voice, while claiming to be the messenger of meaning, appears caught up in a doubling that compromises it" (30): its "double" emerges as a "scattered and secondary vocalization [that] traverses discursive expression, splicing or dubbing it" (30).

[30] Unsurprisingly, feminist students of Christian theology have voiced their deep suspicions relative to the representational power of the classic view of the deity (Jantzen 499).

That mine is not an attempt to project modern concerns back onto the past is suggested by the theological and didactic currency of commentaries on the satisfaction theory in the central Middle Ages.[31] From a non-theological position, it may be argued that the satisfaction theory as propounded by Anselm, for instance, naturalised the current status quo, ecclesiastic and secular law enforcement included, as divinely sanctioned, and, in doing so, it bolstered ancient and contemporary theories that power lay with the ruler, with the implication that, despite certain strictures, he (*sic*) thereby wielded a discretionary tool. There is a remarkable exchange in *Cur Deus Homo* (1.12), where monk Boso, playing the devil's advocate on behalf of the *infideli*, charges Christian thought of inconsistency: while the humans are taught the divine commandment to forgive their transgressors, God does not apply the same politics to His own offenders. Anselm explains it away by making *vindictam facere* ("to execute vengeance") God's exclusive prerogative, only to recant it on the spot:

> There is no inconsistency in God's commanding us not to take upon ourselves what belongs to Him alone. For *to execute vengeance belongs to none but Him who is Lord of all*; for *when the powers of the world rightly accomplish this end, God himself does it who appointed them for the purpose*. (*CDH* 1.12; emphasis added)

Anselm here naturalises justice as a divine attribute and thereby legitimises its administration by human institutions as a divinely appointed task which implicitly emulates God's exercise of His prerogative. *Vindictam facere*, however, is anything but congenial to a theology of divine love as that underpinning the contemporary Cistercian doctrine of Jesus as mother.

There is the further danger that all the allegedly exclusively divine prerogatives, such as God's dignity (*CDH* 1.12), may also be extrapolated to worldly rulers, once *vindictam facere* has been. Was not God's dignity and majesty the template for the secular ruler's, and were not heresy and witchcraft elided with the crime of divine lese-majesty?[32] In fifteenth-century England, the lawyers' construct of the body politic specifically used Christ as the model for

[31] Anselm's Christological atonement theory was developed in highly influential works within theological circles, e.g., Peter Lombard's and Bonaventure's *Sentences*, Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* or John Duns Scotus' Oxford lectures (Adams 17–90). Quite tellingly for the theologians' legalistic bent, Bonaventure distinguished between vindictive punishment, appropriately inflicted on the guilty, and placating punishment, voluntarily assumed by a guiltless person on behalf of the guilty party; Bonaventure declared vicarious expiation by the innocent as better pleasing the severity of divine justice than the punishment of the guilty (qtd. in Adams 41).

[32] In *Policraticus* 4.1 (1159), John of Salisbury argues the prince's "likeness on earth of the divine majesty" and legitimises his power as God's vicarious exercise of power. Innocent III's decretal *Vergentis in senium* (25 March 1199) elides heresy with the *crimen laesae majestatis* in imperial law (Lambert 92–93). On this template, *Malleus Maleficarum* (c. 1486–87) identifies witchcraft as high treason against God's majesty and cites canonical precedents (Pt.1, Q1, 9D-10A).

the king (Kantorowicz 268–71). Furthermore, as so many pronouncements by the Church or theologians emphasise, there is an inescapability of subordination to the will of God (*CDH* 1.15) – hence, by implication, to the will of the ruler and (his) *lex*. Such accruals to a doctrine that started with Augustine's free will had likely abusive consequences in the realm of the political, not least by the violence of representation implicit in the equation of (vindictive) punishment with (divinely ordained) justice.

To conclude, in the N-Town Play 11 the heavenly parliament episode not only grounds the Annunciation but especially suggests the working of the Christian truth regime in the later Middle Ages. Particularly when read with Anselm of Canterbury's *Cur Deus Homo*, the play seems to subvert its overall instructive program and lay bare the human view of divine justice and truth, or rather divine self-consistency in the other-relation. While it is virtually impossible to probe the likely effects such implications may have had on individual spectators, let alone on communities – after all, there is no evidence of the play's performance in any particular East Anglian locality – I cannot suspect that the script's transgressive breach of orthodoxy fell on deaf ears,[33] especially considering the often heterodox religious practices in late medieval England, for instance, Lollardy. What the audience witnessed, therefore, was, at a spiritual no less than meta-discursive level, the agonistic constitution of *Christianitas* as body politic,[34] one wherein the balance of power could at any time incline in favour of revenge, as Misericordia aptly remarks of Justicia, and wherein a vindictive truth regime would be superseded by another one, just as abusive. In other words, the old truth regime, of infinite punishment for a finite offence because of the infinite dignity of the offended party, is about to be replaced with one where the just is to atone for the unjust. Such supersession can only occur, according to Christian dogma, through an especially transgressive form of fiat, the breach of natural law. Ironically, in the N-Town Play 11, the

[33] The position of the two characters, Veritas and Justicia, and their symbolic role map out not only the didactic agenda of the N-Town Annunciation play but also suggest the resonance this heavenly parliament may have had on the spectators, themselves subject to justice and truth games likely to confound or even disempower them, yet – some of them – also tempted to try new truth formulae, for example, the Lollard one. Whatever impact the episode, culminating in Gabriel's embassy to Mary, had on individual spectators, it may further have been inflected by the realisation that while Mercy, one of the four daughters of God, was not much of an institutional character in real life, religious discourse to the contrary notwithstanding, Truth and Justice were the pillars of ecclesial and secular society in ways often harshly felt.

[34] *Christianitas* (Van Engen 539–52), a medieval umbrella term for the world of the Christians, their ethos and their religious–jurisdictional bond, provided a hegemonic representational model imposed by the Church for jurisdictional unity no less than for epistemological coherence. This collective body's physical–spiritual liability to attacks from both within and without, viz. from the interstitial and marginal zones of otherness, became apparent, as did its constructedness, at times of socio-political or religious unrest.

lesser party – (a) *woman* – is asked to consent to this *authorised transgression* (Prosser 2–4, 14–15; emphasis added); in fact, she is assigned this role by the old truth regime which has projected the new one in the debate on the necessity of this transgression of divine nature and then coded it in prophecy. To the extent that the dialogic resolution of the retributive issue posits a conflictual divine persona wherein one character faults another one for being excessively revengeful, the N-Town play also stages *unauthorised transgression*. Such doubts regarding the stability of theo-logy are entertained in a phallogocentric drama whose transgressive figures – albeit thinly disguised – are Mary, on the one hand, and divine Truth, Justice and Mercy, on the other.

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Legal and Social Discourse of Matrimony in Selected N-Town Cycle Plays

Abstract: *The Marriage of Mary and Joseph*, *Joseph's Doubt* and *The Trial of Mary and Joseph* are fifteenth-century pageants from the cycle known as *The N-Town Plays* (or *Ludus Coventriae)*. The first centres on legal and social controversies surrounding the upcoming marriage of Joseph and Mary. The second revolves around Mary's supposed adultery whereas in the third Mary is publicly accused of breaking marriage vows and Joseph of harbouring the alleged offender. The purpose of this paper is to analyze, first of all, why the marriage of Mary and Joseph is regarded as legally valid, even though it does not fulfil the requirement of marital intercourse or social obligation of giving birth. Secondly, the argument will move on to the possible reasons behind such a nigh sacrilegious representation of the Holy Couple and the undermining of its pure character with legal objections and subsequent accusations of lewd conduct. Lastly, the paper will provide an explanation as to why this borderline heretical dramatization was accepted by both society and the Ecclesia. Additionally, it will elucidate the medieval society's tendency to equate the nature of earthly verdicts with divine law and the influence of this tendency on the plays' reception. The method of analysis will be based chiefly on a comparison of all three plays with the codes of medieval canon law, such as Gratian's *Decretum*, works of Doctors of the Church, late medieval marriage treatises composed by bishops and theologians and additional twentieth-century studies.

In three pageants from a fifteenth-century N-Town cycle, a series of biblical events receive their theatrical interpretation.[1] In *The Marriage of Mary and Joseph*, medieval audiences are introduced to the circumstances of the eponymous characters. In *Joseph's Doubt*, the issue of Mary's mysterious pregnancy receives theatrical treatment. Finally, the legal consequences of the Annunciation are pursued in *The Trial of Mary and Joseph*.

In all three plays, it is interesting to observe how the principal elements of belief are imbued with the legal jargon and law codes which are almost as prominent as the religious themes. Additionally, balancing on the verge of

[1] The N-Town cycle, or *Ludus Coventriae*, appears not to have been created with a specific town in mind since the "N" marks the space "for the name of the site of performance" (Spector 1: xiii; 2: 417). It is rather a collection of plays written down and arranged by unknown scribes who worked on the manuscript somewhere towards the end of the fifteenth century (Spector 1: xxii–xxvi, xxxviii; 2: 541–43).

corrupting this biblical narrative, elements of a social debate on marital issues are introduced. Finally, the Holy Couple undergo, to some extent, a legal revision of the validity of their union. What was the purpose of undermining the dogma and the holy institution of marriage and how was this possible in the presence of the medieval Roman Catholic Church? What could be a possible reason for creating a legal setting for these biblical figures? This paper will try to answer these questions.

The theatre has always been a social commentator, especially when the staging and the content of the medieval town cycles were more in the competence of the laity than the clergy. Such plays commented upon and taught about the present reality in an entertaining and fully comprehensible way to the contemporary viewer. The cycle plays evolved later than solitary pageants with their beginnings dated around the fourteenth century (Clopper 746). However, this is a time when legal procedures and regulations implemented by the Church during the reforms of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, after over two hundred years, turned from much resisted novelty into a daily routine. Ecclesiastical courts worked more smoothly, crime detectability was high and verdicts based on hard evidence instead of allegations, suspicions, or old-fashioned ordeals were a common occurrence. The cycle plays elucidated these and other aspects of day-to-day life in the late Middle Ages; it is therefore far from surprising that even in the context of staged biblical events details of everyday reality clipped in, whether social, like those concerning instigators or cuckolded husbands, or legal, like those associated with ecclesiastical trials on marital misconducts.[2]

The Marriage of Mary and Joseph: Social Obligations and Validity

The Marriage of Mary and Joseph, Play 10 from the N-Town cycle, describes the eponymous characters' engagement, wedding and Joseph's subsequent departure. The play begins with the Episcopus' declaration that every girl who has turned fourteen has a duty to be married and create a family. Mary turns out to be exactly that age and is therefore brought before the Episcopus in order to find her a suitable husband. Mary, however, has a rather different approach towards her future union and expresses it in the following lines:

> Aȝens þe lawe wyl I nevyr be,
> But mannys felachep xal nevyr folwe me.
> I wyl levyn evyr in chastyté
> Be þe grace of Goddys wylle. (10.36–39)[3]

[2] For detailed information on the origins of medieval drama, see Clopper or Williams.

[3] Apart from having their own distinctive titles, the pageants in *The N-Town Play: Cotton MS Vespasian D.* are also organized in numerical order according to their chronological reference with

This plain declaration to live "in chastyté" and firm conviction to "with man . . . nevyr mell" (10.76) result, however, in a series of issues of both social and legal significance.

To begin with, Mary's decision goes against the major foundations of medieval social order,[4] that is, the family, which was already society's established basic cell. While its attitude towards sexual intercourse was still extremely reserved, the Church agreed, though reluctantly, that procreation was necessary, and marriage was the only legal, rightful and sinless way to sire children. Woman's duty was to marry, conceive a child and create a family. Moreover, by denying this obligation, Mary went not only against her established social role but also against the Holy Mother Church, presented here in the form of the Episcopus' decree:

> EPISCOPUS. Þe lawe of God byddyth þis sawe:
> Þat at xiiij 3ere of age
> Euery damsel, whatso sche be,
> To þe encrese of more plenté,
> Xulde be browght in good degree
> Onto here spowsage. (10.8–13)

The Episcopus might refer to a certain medieval social idea that each and everyone should be obedient to evangelical teachings accordingly to their social status. This idea, originally devised by St. Augustine of Hippo and Pope Gregory I, was subsequently shaped by bishops Adalbero of Laon and Gerard of Cambrai in the eleventh century into a tripartite division of society (Duby 40–42, 73–75). According to this idea, both fighting and non-fighting laity, apart from their order-associated obligations, were also expected to marry, live with a legitimate spouse, and procreate in order to be a productive part of society (Duby 4–5, 82, 312).

Since those duties were believed to have been issued by God, they became undeniable and indisputable in their nature (Brundage, *Law* 235). Failure to fulfil them was considered a crime and a grievous sin.[5] Therefore, it may be assumed

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the Old and New Testament. Therefore, *The Marriage of Mary and Joseph* will be referred to in-text references as Play 10, *Joseph's Doubt* as Play 12 and *The Trial of Mary and Joseph* as Play 14.

[4] More by way of a social obligation than an actual law, girls were expected to get married and become part of a family. According to Canon law, it was possible as soon as they turned twelve (Brundage, *Law* 357; "Sex and Canon Law" 39).

[5] This is also underlined in the lines touching upon Joachim and Anna's former difficulties with conceiving a child:

> Thei were bothe bareyn, here frute was do;
> They come to þe tempyl at þe last
> To do here sacryfice.

that, by rejecting her duty to give birth, Mary rejected society itself, claiming that her marriage will not be "to þe encrese of more plenté" (10.11).

Nevertheless, Mary had to be espoused, since "in lawe þus it lyce, / þat such weddyd xulde bene" (10.85–86). Therefore, for an unusual bride an unusual groom was found. Joseph admitted that, being an old man, he had no particular need for a wife. However, his lack of success in creating a family shows his failure as a member of that community, which does not go unnoticed by the Episcopus, who tells him that "God wyl þat þu a wyff haue" (10.274).[6] The unusual situation caused by Mary gives him a possibility for atonement, which he accepts, though not without some reluctance:

> JOSEPH. An old man may nevyr thryff
> With a 3onge wyff, so God me saue.
> Nay, nay, sere. . . . (10.278–80)

He expresses a common belief that such a risky enterprise, an old man marrying a much younger woman could bring nothing but trouble.

The play ends with the marriage ceremony and Joseph's departure. When he announces his return in nine months' time, Mary promises to stay chaste and wait for him, like an exemplary wife. Unfortunately, her decision to reject marital intercourse puts her marriage in a state of *non consumatum* which could result in very unfortunate consequences. Earlier Germanic tradition would consider a union that was devoid of procreation as invalid (Brundage, *Law* 130). In Christian Europe this was a rather predominant idea as well, therefore it could have been possible that the fifteenth-century audience of the play could consider Mary not legally married to Joseph (Brundage, *Law* 136, 502). This, however, would amount to a very inconvenient precedent, which could possibly undermine the Church's ongoing struggle for indissoluble marriage.

Until the tenth century, the legal status of marriage was rather uncertain in the case of nobility,[7] and completely loose among the lower classes (d'Avray

> Bycause they hadde nothyr frute nere chylde,
> Reprevyd þei wore of wykkyd and wyllde.
> With grett shame þei were revylyd,
> Al men dede them dyspyce. (10.46–52)

Their visit to the temple had dual purpose: to ask God for blessing them with offspring but also to ask for forgiveness for failing to procure one so far.

[6] On the other hand, the apocryphal gospel of pseudo-Matthew informs us that Joseph is not only a widower and a father but also a grandfather. He fulfilled his duty to society and therefore can take such an unusual bride as Mary ("Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew" 372).

[7] Charlemagne, to mention just him, being a Catholic monarch anointed by the Pope, had "Himiltrud either as a concubine or as a wife, then the daughter of Desiderius King of the Lombards while Himiltrud was still living, then Hildegard while the Lombard princess was still alive" (d'Avray 82).

92–93).[8] Proper legal regulations were a rarity, uncertainties abounded, and local customs were implemented far too frequently. This finally led to the Church's decision to act more sternly in the eleventh and twelfth century, especially during the papacies of Popes Alexander III and Innocent III (Brundage, *Law* 325). Canonists and jurists supported papal initiatives and begun to provide the institution of marriage with a clearly defined, universal legal codification. As a result, marriage went under control of the ecclesiastical law with regulations that focused on a few basic legal principles, such as monogamy, indissolubility, free consent, conjugal faithfulness and exogenism (Brundage, *Law* 183).

These principles were, however, not always easy to uphold. For example, while decree 37 of the Roman Synod of the year 826 forbade "any man to have two wives or concubines," bigamy, though rare, still occurred and semi-bigamous practices of keeping mistresses continued, especially among higher social classes (Brundage, *Law* 444–46, 516; d'Avray 84–85). In the play, Joseph is supplied with "Iii damysellys" ("three damsels") who "xul dwelle" with him and Mary (10.350), thus possibly referring to that former custom.

From the twelfth century indissolubility was a common fact and the marital union, which symbolizes both "the union of Christ and the Church" as well as "God and the soul," was deemed impossible to dissolve (McGlynn and Moll 108). However, the all-too-common clandestine marriages made it difficult for the Church to maintain complete control over the permanence of such unions (Brundage, *Law* 443, 501). Affinity and consanguinity were overused loopholes for annulments. In order to avoid it a practice of issuing wedding banns before the ceremony was introduced, which gave the possibility for any existing impediments to be brought forward and not issuing the banns could result in later annulment if any previously unknown impediments came to light (Brundage, *Law* 362, 442).[9] Even so, previously undisclosed impediments had a tendency to be suddenly "discovered," especially in situations when one of the spouses appeared to be unable to produce a child (Brundage, "Sex and Canon Law" 38; d'Avray 93–95).

There was still one notion inseparable from marital life that troubled the Church authorities almost as gravely as its permanence: marital intercourse. One might think that Mary's decision, however pious, would not trouble decretists and theologians responsible for Church reforms and the canon law since they were very much in favour of strict rules governing one's morality. Sex and, most of all, pleasures that it involved were considered evil and a fertile ground for the

[8] David d'Avray notices that marriages and remarriages in most cases took place even without the presence of any Church officials before the ninth century (78–81, 92).

[9] The issuing of banns, followed by a public ceremony, guaranteed witnesses, while secret or private ceremony had little or none, thus making it easier to undermine the legal existence of marital contract should the need to enforce it arise (Brundage, *Law* 362–63).

escalation of sin and sinful behaviour. The only exception was marital intercourse for the sake of procreation alone.[10] Marital sex became a limited activity while any extramarital sexual activity was persecuted and severely punished (Brundage, *Law* 137, 182–83, 319, 409).

Marital intercourse was problematic since the reformers themselves had a rather ambivalent attitude towards it. While St. Peter Damian (1007–1072), the bishop of Paris, considered sexual temptations together with intercourse as sinful, Alexander of Hales (c. 1185–1245), a Franciscan theologian, regarded marital sex which resulted in procreation as sinless (Brundage, *Law* 185, 197, 448). Similarly to Damian, Abbot Guibert of Nogent (c. 1055–1124) was "obsessed with the filthiness of sex"; thoughts and dreams about sex jeopardized human chastity and morality, and were a straight way to eternal damnation, he thought (Brundage, *Law* 185). The *Decretum* by Burchard of Worms (c. 950–1025) listed many consequences of extramarital and immoderate marital sex, among which was "spiritual blindness, . . . hatred of God's commandments, . . . misery in this life and despair for the future" (Brundage, *Law* 185**)**. Ivo of Chartres (c. 1040–1115) based his view on St. Augustine's teachings, less strict than Damian's, and considered a sexual act with the aim of procreation sinless, while the one for the sake of lust alone sinful and despicable (Brundage**,** *Law* 197). For Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), marital sex for pleasure alone was only "venially sinful" (Brundage, *Law* 449**)** while St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) considered marital intercourse to be not only good but also instrumental in containing other vile temptations (Brundage**,** *Law* 197). In the end, however, any ideas that completely condemned marital sex were more than extinct after the Gnostic heresies, whose hatred towards human corporality, procreation and sacrament of marriage made any lack of marital intercourse highly suspicious (Brundage**,** *Law* 186, 423, 431).[11]

On the other hand, the syneisaktic, or "spiritual" marriages, though rare, were well known to occur since lack of marital sex was acceptable when accompanied by a pious and exemplary Christian behaviour.[12] These unusual marriages originated from an ascetic idea which relied on "domestic relations under which two self-professed ascetics of different sexes decided upon chaste

[10] In his book, James A. Brundage provides a very clear diagram explaining the restrictions put on the marital intercourse (*Law* 162).

[11] Cathars considered all that is physical to be evil and ultimately treated marriage as something evil as well. "Sex was bad, outside or inside marriage, and procreative sex was the worst of its kind" (d'Avray 66).

[12] According to McGlynn and Moll, the syneisaktic marriage was considered very problematic and disapproved by some Church Fathers (e.g., John Chrysostom) from the third century; they were believed to be a "new avenue to temptation" and at serious risk of breaking the vows of chastity, since it was considered too difficult for ordinary people to remain steadfast in such relationships (105).

cohabitation" (Elliott 3). Such ascetic restraints were very much in accordance with ecclesiastical teachings and since they happened rarely, the Church could accept these unusual marriages as symbols of piety to which one should always aspire. But were they legally valid unions?

Peter Damian and Ivo of Chartres as well as Peter Lombard (c. 1096–1164) and Hugh of St. Victor (c. 1096–1141) argued that consent created a union. For Ivo, "even an unconsummated marriage fully symbolized the tie between Christ and the Church" while Peter Damian ridiculed the coital theory stating that "if indeed marriage is made by coitus, then every time a man makes love to his wife no doubt they get married all over again" (Brundage, *Law* 188–89). For Hugh, marriage represented, apart from that of Christ with the Church, another union, of God with the soul, which, apart from consensual, needed no additional physical affirmation (Elliott 137–38).[13] Using the example of Mary and Joseph, Peter Lombard argued that "an exchange of consent . . . made a marriage legally and sacramentally binding even if the couple did not engage in sex" (Coontz 106). By words of consent, he understood vows uttered in the present tense, mentioning acceptance of the other person as a legitimate spouse. This is present in the vows exchanged by both Joseph and Mary:

> *Episcopus et idem Joseph:*
> 'Here I take þe, Mary, to wyff,
> To hauyn, to holdyn, as God his wyll with us wyl make.
> And as longe as bethwen us lestyght oure lyff
> To loue 3ow as myself my trewth I 3ow take.' (10.310–13)

In the eyes of the Church, after the reforms of the twelfth century, Mary's decision not to engage in any sexual activities with Joseph had no influence on the validity of their union and could not be used as an excuse for dissolving their marriage.

Joseph's Doubt: Social and Legal Attitudes towards Adultery

Joseph's Doubt begins with Joseph returning to find Mary in the state of advanced pregnancy, inciting his rather dramatic reaction:

> Þi wombe to hy3e doth stoned!
> I drede me sore I am betrayd,
> Sum other man þe had in honde
> Hens sythe þat I went! (12.26–29)

[13] This was actually a continuation of earlier theological thought and derived from the third-century views of Origen, who, after the analysis of *The Song of Songs*, concluded that all Christians are virtually brides of God. This allowed for such development in thought as considering the Church as being the bride of God or the soul as being the bride of Christ (d'Avray 8).

Though Mary's virgin pregnancy is of miraculous origin, the fact that Joseph is incognizant of this is resourcefully exploited by the author of the pageant. His use of familiarization combined with dramatic irony presents the Holy Couple not only as biblical characters but also as any other ordinary townspeople subjected to rather trivial and simple situations like that of an older man being cuckolded by a much younger wife.

This problem has already been prophesied in the previously discussed play. While not directly, a hint was given in Anne's advice list for her newly espoused daughter:

> I pray þe, Mary, my swete chylde,
> Be lowe and buxhum, meke and mylde,
> Sad and sobyr, and nothyng wylde,
> And Goddys blyssynge þu haue. (10.392–95)

This list somewhat defines the woman's desirable demeanour in medieval marriages. The reason to keep wives "meke and mylde . . . and nothyng wylde," especially in cases of considerable age differences between the spouses, was a way of preventing potentially sinful behaviour. Eileen Power mentions similar instructions when portraying the example of le Ménagier de Paris ("the Goodman of Paris"), who wrote for his young spouse a handbook on how to become a perfect wife (96–97).[14] The handbook provides teachings similar to the ones given by Anna: that the wife should be obedient and refrain from any activities that would harm both her and her husband's reputation (Power 96–98).

In Play 12, this reputation, from Joseph's perspective, appears to be in serious jeopardy. Therefore, for her transgressions, he considers giving Mary away "to þe busshop" to be judged and, presumably, stoned.[15] According to James A. Brundage, in Jewish society adultery committed by a woman was a serious offence not only against her husband but also "against the whole community" and it was up to the community to "prosecute the wrongdoers" (*Law* 55). The punishments varied from simple flogging to exile or sometimes even death by stoning.

[14] Le Ménagier de Paris (exact name unknown) was a wealthy house owner in Paris in the late fourteenth century, who, while being in his late fifties, married a girl who was in her mid-teens. For him, being a wealthy merchant, and her, a fifteen-year-old orphan from a different province, the marriage was nothing more than a marriage of convenience, at least initially, since Eileen Power in *Medieval People* suggests that eventually a genuine affection evolved among the two (118–19).

[15] JOSEPH. To þe busshop I wole it telle
Þat he þe lawe may here do,
With stonys here to qwelle. (12.95–97)

Joseph eventually abandons the idea of making Mary subjected to punishment. Instead, due to his semi-comic role in this pageant, he falls into despair and self-pity, and is terrified with the opinion of the community and other men's derision:

> All men may me now dyspyse
> And seyn, 'Olde cokwold, þi bowe is bent
> Newly now aftyr þe Frensche gyse.' (12.54–56)

Ivo of Chartres as well as Gratian considered adultery "the second most serious offence after heresy," incest and sodomy, and before fornication (Brundage, *Law* 208; "Sex and Canon Law" 40–41). In reality, cases of adultery were most frequent for legal administrators of the Church to deal with, since the Church was the first authority in these matters (Brundage, *Law* 460–61). Furthermore, in the Christian medieval society, by not reacting to his wife's alleged misdeed, Joseph has also committed a crime. The Roman law of the late Roman Empire stated that if a husband forgave his wife's adulterous acts he was immediately treated as "an accomplice in her crime" and could be prosecuted and subjected to penalties that were usually issued for prostitution and pandering (Brundage, *Law* 45). Canon law, which derived from the Roman law, introduced similar regulations: lack of action on the part of the husband was treated as condoning the deed (Brundage, *Law* 208–09, 483–84).[16] However, husbands were warned not to punish or in any way harm their unfaithful wives, and in the case of "murder of passion," they would have been charged with full responsibility for homicide (Brundage, *Law* 207–08; "Sex and Canon Law" 42).

An explanation of Joseph's troubles might be provided by St. Bernard of Clairvaux, who stated that marital sex, though arguably limited and better controlled, was still a great "outlet of sexual urges that would otherwise lead people into debauchery, incest and homosexual relationships" (Brundage, *Law* 197). Since Mary and Joseph's "spiritual" union lacked such an outlet, it would have been quite natural for Joseph to suspect that young Mary had to search for the aforementioned outlet somewhere else.

The play's climax is an angelic intervention which explains to Joseph Mary's extraordinary condition. "I telle þe," as the Angel says to Joseph, "God wyl of here be born, / And sche clene mayd as she was beforn" (12.156–57). However, while the husband is enlightened, the rest of the community, which considers this marriage to be its vital part, is not. This, unfortunately, leads to a predicament that Joseph and Mary will soon have to face.

[16] Killing the wife's paramour was a different matter and, according to Brundage, "the courts were notably reluctant to punish the husband who killed his wife's lover" ("Sex and Canon Law" 42).

The Trial of Mary and Joseph: Public Accusations and Legal Proceedings

While the two plays discussed above have a legal character in the way that they concern law and lawful behaviour as well as incorporate some legal language, *The Trial of Mary and Joseph* describes in detail the entire legal process that accompanied ecclesiastical trials for adultery. According to Brundage, the proceedings were based on Gratian's *Decretum Gratiani*, a twelfth-century collection of works of earlier decretists, later supplemented with other texts, such as Bernard of Pavia's *Brevarium extravagantium*, which later influenced more extensive works, like *Liber Extra* by Pope Gregory IX (*Law* 326–27, 578).

The legal procedure in Play 14 begins when two citizens decide that it is their civic duty to notify the local ecclesiastical court about the misdeeds of a certain maiden, as shown in the following excerpt:

> PRIMUS DETRACTOR. A ȝonge man may do more chere in bedde
> To a ȝonge wench þan may an olde.
> Þat is þe cawse such lawe is ledde,
> Þat many a man is a kokewolde. (14.102–05)

The motif of defamation, which was quite popular and appears, for example, in Chaucer's works,[17] here is given a legal context. The accusation in trials for adultery did not have to be made by the parties immediately involved since, according to Brundage, the sin of adultery affected "the entire community," therefore it was in community's right to make an accusation in order to eradicate and punish that which ruined its harmony (*Law* 411). In the play, this role of public accusers is fulfilled by the two Detractors (14.73–100).[18]

While suspicion, not necessarily the husband's, was enough to begin the procedure, the suspicion had to have solid grounds. For example, questionable behaviour of one's wife while in the company of another man was not enough. Of course, couples caught *in flagranti* gave the ground by definition, but it becomes obvious that in most cases evidence material in trials of adultery was problematic at least, and ecclesiastical courts had to assess the reasonableness of the spouse's suspicion or rest on sworn testimonies of witnesses (Brundage, *Law* 321). This did not solve the problem since, given the nature of the evidence, it could be difficult to determine whether the witness was telling the truth or not. The *Decretum* slightly helped in this matter, advising that testimonies should be

[17] See, for example, *Friar's Tale* (Chaucer 252–61).

[18] The creators of the play, probably for the purpose of dramatic presentation, omitted the fact that "adultery charges had to be made in writing" and follow "appropriate forms" (Brundage, *Law* 321).

closely examined and ushering the judges to take extra caution in detecting other agendas of the witnesses, such as "affection, family ties, . . . self interest, fear or greed" (Brundage, *Law* 253). Pope Alexander III supported the policy and decreed that depositions of at least two witnesses were needed in marriage-related cases (Brundage, *Law* 345).[19] In the case of Mary, however, evidence of sworn testimony is unnecessary. With Joseph's vow that he had no sexual relations with her, Mary, being visibly pregnant, seems to have no legal ways of defence. How would she plead not guilty then?

Sworn testimonies or vows of innocence were very often used before the tenth century for either admitting one's guilt or pleading innocence. In *Joseph's Doubt*, Mary actually performs such an oath before Joseph when she says: "I dede nevyr forfete with man, iwys" (12.40). The defence through an unsupported vow of innocence was called, according to Richard Firth Green, the "exculpation by oath" (412–13). However, this legal device made it possible to skilfully design an oath that would allow for both not sinning through attestation of an untruth and not admitting to one's guilt.

This practice became heavily exploited in medieval and later romances. Richard Firth Green gives an example of such exculpation from Thomas of Britain's version of the Tristan and Iseult legend. In Thomas' text, Iseult arrives at the site of her trial by boat. She arranges for Tristan, disguised as a poor pilgrim, to help her disembark and carry her from the boat to the shore, during which she "hoists her skirt" and makes him fall "next her naked side." As a result of this ploy, Iseult could swear to King Mark that nobody except him and "the poor pilgrim" lay next to her naked body, which was also confirmed by a successfully passed ordeal of hot iron (Green 413–14).[20]

A form of this traditional method of purgation is also utilized in Play 14:

> EPISCOPUS. Here is þe botel of Goddys vengeauns.
> This drynk xal be now þi purgacyon.
> Þis [hath] suche vertu by Goddys ordenauns
> Þat what man drynk of þis potacyon
> And goth serteyn in processyon
> Here in þis place þis awtere abowth,
> If he be gylty, sum maculacion
> Pleyn in his face xal shewe it owth. (14.234–41)

[19] Notoriety, which was a public fame or opinion about a particular person, was also considered to be a proof. When one of the spouses was a known adulterer, the courts could take action immediately without considering any other type of evidence (Brundage, *Law* 320).

[20] Green also gives an example of another oath, but this time not from a medieval text but a seventeenth-century ballad *Clerk Saunders.* In this ballad, one of the protagonists, May Margaret, "uses her lover's sword to lift the latch of her chamber door and, having bound her eyes, carries him bodily to her bed, so that she may later swear, 'her oath to save', that she had not let him in, nor had seen him that night, nor had he set foot on her bedroom floor" (Green 413).

The evidence of ordeals was sometimes taken into consideration, though Gratian was strongly against them because of their questionable character. Compurgation was likewise untrustworthy, though deemed acceptable in the case of unavailability of any other kind of evidence (Brundage, *Law* 253, 345). Unfortunately, there was no one to vouch for Joseph and Mary and every proof presented so far shows Mary's guilt. At this point, there was no other way to prove her innocence than by means of divine intervention, hence the use of an ordeal.

The "Ordeal of the Bitter Water" incorporated in the play comes from the Book of Numbers (Num. 5.11–31) and was to be utilized whenever the husband suspected his wife of adultery. The idea behind this particular ordeal was to judge the accused's guilt or innocence on the basis of the reaction to the water's taste.

Mary, however, shows no reaction to the potion and successfully passes the ordeal, which is acknowledged by the Episcopus, who, despite her evident pregnancy, says that he "cannat, be non ymagynacyon, / Preve hyre gylty and sinful of lyff" (14.350−51). This infuriates Primus Detractor, who at this stage begins to accuse the Episcopus of falsifying the trial due to known consanguinity with the defendant:

> PRIMUS DETRACTOR. Because sche is syb of ȝoure kynreed,
> Þe drynk is chaungyd by sum fals wyle
> Þat sche no shame xulde haue þis steed! (14.355−57)

This accusation underlines the grounds on which Gratian and other decretists considered ordeals unreliable, since the possibility of misconduct or simple falsification was too great (Brundage, *Law* 224, 253, 319, 416). The Primus Detractor's accusation, however, results in the Episcopus' counteraccusation:

> EPISCOPUS. Becawse þu demyst þat we do falshede,
> And for þu dedyst hem first defame,
> Þu xalt right here, magré þin heed,
> Beforn all þis pepyl drynk of þe same. (14.358−61)

When Primus Detractor undergoes the ordeal, he is immediately struck with various pains and ailments thus proving, to his own surprise, the potion and ordeal to be genuine (14.364–65), which officially clears Mary's name and ends the accusation.[21]

[21] Almyghty God, what may þis mene?
. . . . . .
Sche is clene mayde, bothe modyr and wyff! (14.346, 353)

Even though Mary and Joseph may initially seem to transgress in the plays – first by acting against medieval society, then by the alleged adultery and immoral behaviour – in the end, their supposed transgressions, when confronted, only prove the sanctity of marriage as a holy institution. Mary and Joseph are made an example of a perfect union that symbolizes everything that marriage should be according to Christian dogmas. It not only fulfils the duty of procreation but also manages to achieve this goal without risking a marital intercourse, thus preventing the possibility of corrupting their holy union with the sin of lust. Richard Firth Green believes that medieval society saw no difference between the divine law and an earthly code of law (410–11, 416). In medieval common thought, the latter was only the extension of the former; hence every verdict made by a particular judge was similar to God's own law, a variation of divine judgment, unquestionable in its wisdom and undeniably just.[22] Therefore, by showing the Holy Couple's assumed transgressions in contemporaneous legal surroundings and subjecting them to legal norms, codes and procedures, the author's goal was to achieve the confirmation of their sanctified status by proving their union and actions to be in accordance with the law, thus underlining known religious themes.

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[22] In Green's opinion, this also created some problems for the judges themselves. Whenever a verdict was deemed unjust by the majority of the people, hence untrue to God's will, the judge could have found himself persecuted by unsatisfied citizenry and accused of going against God's will (416–17).

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Freedom above the Law: Friedrich Schiller's *Die Räuber*

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to analyze one of the most problematic works of the German poet and philosopher, Friedrich Schiller: his first play, *Die Räuber* (*The Robbers*, 1782). Following Hammer and Hart's Gadamerian literary hermeneutics, I will focus on the subversive role that Schiller attaches to the figure of the criminal in this work.

Written seven years before the French Revolution, the play has traditionally been interpreted as a pre-revolutionary drama that stresses the emancipatory power of the Enlightenment and the Revolution. The way in which Schiller appears to use the dichotomy between criminal and society supports this view: the noble criminal opposes the Law as the incarnation of a severe and narrow rationalism. However, the shared tragic end of the Moor brothers, the protagonists of the play, proves the enlightened emancipation to be fallible and reveals its inner despotic potential. This is not due to the final retrograde meaning or because the play is not intimately concerned with freedom and individual autonomy. Instead, its ultimate aim is not to be propagandistic, or even constructive, but harshly critical, uncovering and bearing witness to the oppressive character of Schiller's contemporary society and its public (penal system) and private (family) institutions.

Subverting the traditional association between criminal-evil/compliant-good and virtue-recompense/vice-punishment, Schiller breaks up with the retributive logic on which he does not rely, as if it were a kind of unrecognized superstition that undermines autonomous thinking and action. Through this reversal, Schiller exposes the irrational bases of the retributive urge rooted in Christian humanism, which is not founded upon true justice but upon vengeance and the heteronomy of transcendent concepts that cannot support an autonomous moral.

The aim of this essay is to analyze one of the most controversial works of the German poet and philosopher, Friedrich Schiller: his first play, *The Robbers* (1782). Following Hammer and Hart's Gadamerian literary hermeneutics, I will focus on the subversive role that Schiller attaches to the figure of the criminal in this work. As Schillerian drama can be seen as a practice exploring the possibility of real freedom, this essay will also investigate crime and human suffering.

Almost every Schillerian protagonist could be interpreted as a criminal figure in a certain way: from a socio-political point of view, like the figures analyzed here, to a gender view, even in terms of the pre-Marxian class conflict. We are aware that none of Schiller's characters is finally punished despite their

criminality because, in his drama, the common link between crime and punishment, paradigmatically exemplified by the Kantian "He has murdered so he must die" (Kant 90), is just a ritual of retribution that oversimplifies the deeds of the criminal who, in his anti-social dimension, can be understood as a creative and free personality. In fact, and aesthetically speaking, the criminal role is the best portrayer of freedom. While Schiller did not develop this theory in his studies on tragedy and the idea of the sublime[1] until several years later, its roots could probably be found in the play's explicit engagement with criminality. However, crime is not easy to distinguish here, inasmuch as particular deeds bear the label of recognizable crimes but they are committed by agents we are not aimed to identify as criminals. In that sense, we can define *The Robbers* as a complex critique of the dichotomy between criminality and compliance by means of a pair of false doubles: the two Moor brothers, which reverses the traditional linkage between compliance and goodness and between criminality and evilness (Hammer, *Sublime Crime* 80).

The play starts with a clash between those two brothers: Karl, the good elder brother, and Franz, the evil younger brother, who wants to rule over his father's domain even if it means killing both his father and brother. Karl, who had left home in order to be released from social constraints, now wants to return as a prodigal son to his fatherland and to his beloved, Amalia. However, Franz deceives their father, making him think that Karl has become a bandit without honour. When Karl thinks he has been rejected by his father, also duped by Franz's letter, he becomes a real robber, committing the most dreadful crimes that can be imagined, along with his gang to whom he swears total loyalty. Meanwhile, Franz has obtained the absolute power he had longed for by means of a ploy. He locks his father up but announces his death to everybody, becoming the father's inheritor in the absence of his criminalized brother. Finally, horrified by his band's and his own crimes, Karl decides to return home disguised as a count. Not only does he discover that his father is still alive but he also learns about Franz's conspiracy and orders his comrades to capture his brother alive. Franz commits suicide before the robbers can find him. Although it seems that the lovers, Karl and Amalia, could finally be reunited, the robbers' gang reminds their chief of the allegiance oath he had made. In order to remain loyal to his comrades, Karl kills Amalia, also rushing his father's real death. The play ends tragically when Karl surrenders and turns himself in to the civil authorities.

[1] Cf. Schiller's "Über den Grund des Vergnügens an tragischen Gegenstanden" (1792), "Vom Erhabenen (Zur western Ausführung einiger kantischen Ideen)" (1793–1794) and "Über das Erhabene" (1801).

Metaphysics versus Politics

Despite the complexity of the play, which includes several different plots, the focus on criminality provides a concrete perspective that takes account of a possible rebellion against social order, autonomous thinking and action. The rupture between crime and penal punishment in the social and institutional linkage also implies a new understanding of Christianity as an object of derision. Firstly, it is because the practices of Christian morality and the effective personal action are totally inimical to each other within fictional societies. Secondly, the insistence on the practical efficacy of criminal against compliant deeds reverses the traditional connection between metaphysics and politics, a reversal which is fundamental in Schiller's general thought. The first must not only cede to politics but also admit its essentially political groundings (Hammer, *Sublime Crime* 80). By doing this, Schiller exposes his doubts concerning the moral foundation grounded in the metaphysical and heavenly. He also establishes a relationship between doubts surrounding the theoretical context of man's self-determination and destination.

We can possibly find the roots of these doubts in Schiller's Karlsschule years. Despite his desire to become a theologian, Schiller was forced by Duke Karl Eugen to study medicine. The despotism of this educational institution is one of the most important fields of the subsequent Schillerian aesthetic, social and political theory, and of his drama practice. His characters always defy the prevailing order: an order that criminalizes, imposes exile and makes self-realization impossible.

In fact, once Schiller had written *The Robbers*, he was compelled by the Duke not to write anymore under the penalty of exile: "If you dare to write any more plays, you shall be broke," the Duke said to him (qtd. in Dewhurst and Reeves 73). However, it was not the corrosive and rebellious content of the play that provoked Schiller's punishment but the mere fact of writing. In this sense, Schiller's preference for criminal protagonists is obviously related to his theory of the tragedy and the sublime but also to his own criminalization as an author. In biographical terms, we could describe this feature as a symptomatic response to the harsh discipline the young Schiller suffered in the Karlsschule, planned almost like a modern penal institution (Hart 18–21).

As an Enlightened despot, Karl Eugen saw himself as a father to his people. His condemnation stamped Schiller's writing as an act of transgression against the Father and Fatherland, making Schiller not a revolutionary but a traitor (Hammer, *Schiller's Wound* 48). Schiller himself declares so in his report of the play: "The play cost me the family and the fatherland" ("Ankündigung" 77). In this sense, the daily and deep experience of absolutism probably inspired Schiller's notion of freedom as a supreme spiritual, intellectual and moral value

(Beiser 14–15). In fact, freedom is also a supreme aesthetic value and the main aim of tragedy is nothing but the self-awareness of freedom as a power to act as responsible agents, regardless of any external motive (Beiser 239). This means that the tragic hero must not be good to gain our admiration, because what we admire is his or her *freedom*; in tragedy, freedom prevails over morals. Hence, what Schiller sought to produce in the audience with *The Robbers* was to horrify as well as to enrapture them, forcing them to identify with its outlaw characters: a shattering of enthusiasm that could produce in the public the revolutionary dissolution of all the petrified certainties of civil life. Buchwald quotes an eye-witness's testimony of the rapture of the audience in the first performance of the play in January 1782:

> The theatre was like bedlam, with rolling eyes, shaking fists and hoarse cries in the auditorium. Strangers embraced one another in tears, women staggered towards the exit on the point of swooning. There was a universal commotion like in Chaos, and from its mists was born a new Creation. (qtd. in Dewhurst and Reeves 69–70)

Revolution and Self-criticism

Written seven years before the French Revolution, the play has usually been interpreted as a pre-revolutionary drama seeking to stress the emancipatory power of the Enlightenment and the Revolution. The way in which Schiller appears to use the dichotomy between criminal and society supports this view: the noble criminal who opposes himself to the Law as the incarnation of a severe and narrow rationalism (Reinhold 193). From this perspective, the main aim of Schiller's play would be to provide a proof that the fight of the free criminal against the feudal society and the church would remake our socio-political world following the enlightened precepts of freedom, goodness, perfection, truth and justice.

However, it is precisely the stress of this kind of precepts or high values that gives us the key to the real issues of the play: the limits of these ideals. What Schiller exposes in *The Robbers* is the impossible application of the ideal to reality without the suffering or even destruction of the latter and the corruption of the former. Therefore the play proves the enlightened emancipation to be fallible and reveals its inner despotic potential.

We bear witness to the failure of the initially good and free criminal Karl Moor, who not only destroys his dreams of social perfection and freedom but also kills his fiancée, Amalia. But we must notice that, finally, it is the antagonist of the play, Karl's evil but compliant brother Franz, who, despite all his cynicism and cruel failed ambition, proves to be more consistent and loyal to himself and to the decisions he has made than the formerly noble Karl.

This tragic end does not mean a final impugnation of freedom or individual autonomy. Schiller did not try to overcome the enlightened project but to radicalize it. Even so, at this early stage of his thought, this radicalization may have been unconscious, or at least not systematic. As Faustino Oncina says:

> The Enlightenment not only underestimated men's violence but also its own. Why did a space of freedom turn into a bloodthirsty settling of scores? Schiller surmises the scandal of authoritarian freedom; the fact that the same freedom lodges a moment of violence as soon as, provided with power, it goes straight through life and carries out its ideals. Schiller's idealism would be tragic in a certain manner. The hero creates, in the name of his ideals, a reality that finally devours him. (71; my translation)

Thus, this is a play about individual autonomy. It depicts the collision between an individual seeking his autonomy and society and its institutional figures, represented here by the Father and the world of the family. The play exposes the collision of such autonomy with heteronymous instances like the prevailing moral or metaphysical system. The freedom of choice must triumph even over such ideals as the Good, the Justice or the Freedom itself as an ideal. Karl fails to be totally free precisely because he is not independent of those ideals that here work not as mere heuristic values but as dogmatic devices that short-circuit the autonomy of the character. Laura Anna Macor wittingly notes that, in the final scene of *The Robbers*, the supposedly virtuous deed of doing honour to the robber's oath means to Karl not only the loss of his beloved, but also the absolute loss of the possibility to behave autonomously (84). As Karl himself recognizes: "Should I, then, carry on hiding, as if it were a robbery, a life that according to the celestial judges, does not belong to me anymore?" (5.2.153).

This emphasis on individual autonomy and the possibility of its loss is precisely what breaks up with any social, political or moral conception founded upon retributive justice. In a 1786 poem, "Resignation," Schiller insisted on this idea:

> Let him enjoy, who has no faith; eterne
> As earth, this truth!-Abstain, who faith can learn!
> The world's long history is the world's own doom.
>
> Hope thou hast felt,-thy wages, then, are paid;
> Thy faith 'twas formed the rapture pledged to thee.
> Thou might'st have of the wise inquiry made,-
> The minutes thou neglectest, as they fade,
> Are given back by no eternity! (Schiller, *Poesía* 158)[2]

[2] The original version of this poem was published in the second volume of the *Thalia* review in 1786.

This means that neither a celestial recompense nor an infernal punishment could be understood as the ultimate incentive of action because they constitute a heteronymous purpose for the virtuous behaviour. Our temporal existence can be judged only from temporal values, not imposing over it transcendental standards. Schiller's main worry at this moment is to guarantee and protect the autonomy of virtue from any external reference, whether worldly or celestial, that could be detrimental to its purity (Macor 69). This means that, in a way, it is better to behave in a morally reprehensible way but because of an autonomous choice than to be virtuous in order to obtain a further recompense of any kind or because of the threat of a terrible (moral or religious) punishment.

Initially unproblematic freedom is one of the reasons for Schiller's preference for criminal characters. In fact, in one of his Philosophy of History writings, Schiller reminds us that the original crime of man against God was the first manifestation of freedom (Schiller, *Escritos* 64). Even God is absent in this play – God as a father who judges, rewards and punishes, as his existence may be used as an alibi for any action, restricting and compromising autonomous will and freedom.

Both Karl and Franz are rebels against such God and his manifestations through civil institutions, although not in the same manner. On the one hand, Karl breaks up with the Law in order to be free. On the other hand, through his evil thirst of destruction and power, Franz exposes the emotional emptiness of father-love under patriarchy. However, despite Franz's invocation of the materialistic ethics of self-interest, he does not act out the desire to do evil per se but rather from a feeling of personal injustice: "She [his mother] gave me nothing. What I become is my own task. We [he and his brother] have the same rights" (1.1.42). Franz claims his recognition as a full person by the father, who seems to love only Karl. In Hammer's view, Franz's lonely rebellion against his father represents an attempt to reject and circumvent patriarchy and the contradictory values it incarnates (*Sublime Crime* 91).

As already suggested, Franz proves to be more subversive than Karl does. He represents all that has been deeply repressed within authoritarian society. Franz wants to be recognized. Deprived of mother and ignored by father, he is never acknowledged as a full person in the play. In contrast, Karl stands to be both the literal and figurative inheritor of patriarchal power (Hammer, *Schiller's Wound* 41) and virtue begins to melt into vice. Karl is both the ultimate hero as well as the ultimate murderer. In the same manner, Franz is the ultimate villain and the ultimate victim. In the case of Karl, evil is produced by virtue itself, by the most beautiful, pure and innocent: the same desire for perfection (Villacañas 189). However, Karl can neither love nor tolerate the destruction he has produced, and he cannot assume responsibility for it. In his view, the hero Karl has forged a pure world that inexorably crashes with his own real world, where he finds both what he loves and what he despises. This movement forces Karl

both to confine himself in his own identity and to spurn a great part of it (Villacañas 196). Franz, on the other hand, is fully consistent with himself and with his decisions until his own end. He commits suicide but surrenders neither to God nor to the Devil. He never regrets the evil he has done because it was his evil, a decision he has made in order to achieve an end he has consciously elaborated.

Franz avoids his final condemnation when he denies the father's judgement as providential and affirms his own existence as fortuitous. Erasing all teleology, he grounds civilian morality not in metaphysical terms but in political, social and temporal ones. Franz is also capable of exceptional acts: he thinks he is guilty of patricide and fratricide, which, according to the Christian law, are the greatest of sins. In this sense, he is warned by his confessor: the crime that he thinks he has perpetrated is one that "men neither commit nor forgive it" (5.1.141). However, Franz still keeps on claiming the uniqueness of his crime precisely because he is seeking true recognition: "I have not been a vulgar murderer" (5.1.143). It does not matter to him whether he is distinguished as the worst of murderers as long as he is finally recognized. Karl, however, loses all he has been, his great criminality, when he denies all he has previously done surrendering to the civil order, unable to maintain justice and social equilibrium.

Schiller needed the charisma of crime to explore the kinds of great deeds that challenge order and define great man. According to Hart:

> *The Robbers* completely undermines the ideal symmetry or economy of crime and punishment by obfuscating crime and excluding the appropriate penal agencies. Even where minor figures are apprehended and held for legal punishment, this punishment is not applied in an adequately retributive or deterrent manner. (65)

This means that, to Schiller, penal law is not valid as a social regulator. A terrible injustice is done by killing an innocent man instead of the real bandit at the only moment of the play when penal law is at work (2.3.76). The retributive apparatus betrays its own aim, namely, to defend social justice and equilibrium, as soon as it starts to work according to Schiller

We find that the greatness of individual autonomy finally prevails over all punishing power through indifference to punishment in Schiller's play. There are no "great punishments" that could measure up to these great crimes. In the case of the tortured Karl, greatness is his own punishment (Hart 68). In the case of Franz, he is a victim of himself: a victim of the coherence of his cynicism and wickedness. As Hart says:

> In practice, Schiller treated crime as a fascinating intervention into social symmetry that was not to be diminished by a rebalancing punishment. The fiction and the drama resist the restoration of (bourgeois) equilibrium, and tend to establish the exceptional disruption as a

> manifestation of the courage, strategic intelligence or "greatness" that humans are capable of. (119)

Schiller does not acknowledge punishment as inherently linked to crime or to its prevention. In fact, penal practices can be understood as a residue of a corrupt system, and to be faithful to them remains a kind of unrecognized superstition (Hart 67). However, in a certain sense, the dogmatic belief in the feasibility of absolute perfection exemplified by Karl implies another kind of superstition. Thus, the Karl-Franz pair is a set of false doubles and the dogmatism of enlightened ideals is a kind of false antagonism of the impositions of the corrupt system.

This is one of the reasons why neither brother succeeds in being free. Karl and Franz undertake the process of their emancipation from a wrong base. Karl swears his allegiance to the robbers' band (1.2.57), which implies total alienation of the capacity of his emancipation (Macor 84) as it represents the dogmatism of idealism. On the other hand, the process of Franz's emancipation and recognition fails because it is not founded upon his will for freedom but upon his megalomaniac and selfish desire for control over all.

Schiller depicts a very powerful critique – in fact, an auto-critique – of potential degenerations of the Enlightenment. It exposes the crash of the materialistic philosophy personified by Franz Moor which cannot produce the liberation of anyone, even of its portrayer, who loses himself in a labyrinth of loneliness. It also shows the collapse of idealism in the sense embodied by Karl: political excesses of abstraction as well as the coldness and emptiness of universality, prefiguring fatal mistakes caused seven years later by similar dogmatism of the French Revolution. Schiller's aim is to stress the impossibility of obtaining freedom by means of the mere empire of the Law, because it confuses the conflict with the concrete.

Through the dual fates of the Moor brothers Schiller exposes the insidious power of an authoritarian regime that perpetuates its injustice through individuals. He shows a society locked up in a process of self-destruction, a society itself that is criminal. Thus, we are presented with another pair of false doubles: a compliant society is as hazardous as a criminal one. The home and the family, that is, the private sphere of life, are as dangerous as the robbers' allegiance in the public sphere as they both replicate oppressive mechanisms of the other. They are both traps that allow Franz and Karl nowhere to go but to death (Hammer, *Schiller's Wound* 31). As Hammer highlights, this unrelenting grimness of the fictional world of *The Robbers* implicitly demands that we reinvent ourselves ethically, politically and generically despite the fact that such a reinvention proves possible for none of the characters (*Schiller's Wound* 108).

Although Hart believes that if *The Robbers* does not propose an alternative to the system it criticizes, it is, first and foremost, because the play does not recognize punishment (that is to say, the state's penal arsenal) as being inherently related to crime or its prevention (67). We think that it is due to its essentially critical character that does not intend to construct anything but to criticize harshly and expose the irrationality and injustice of the socio-political order. Schiller develops a strong critique of the difficulties involved in the application of the enlightened educative project to reality: its destructive potential and the possibility of becoming a fanatic of the freedom.

While Schiller's work poses a very powerful and radically concrete critique of the socio-political system of his age and of civil evil, it is, at the same time, unable to propose a feasible solution. The problem is the inherent idealism of the play, an idealism that, according to Terry Eagleton, is symptomatic of aesthetic critique:

> Aesthetics are not only incipiently materialist, they also provide, at the very heart of the Enlightenment, the most powerful available critique of bourgeois possessive individualism and appetitive egoism. . . . The aesthetic may be the language of political hegemony and an imaginary consolation for a bourgeoisie bereft of a home but it is also, in however idealist a vein, the discourse of utopian critique of the bourgeois social order. (337)

The play's final evocation of humanity is as abstract and intangible as the slogans of the revolution, unable to become historically real (Villacañas 195). Finally, only morals could have saved the world from being a banal fortune game but the moral Karl eventually claims is completely abstract and unable to reconstitute order.

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Geographic Transgression and Epic Theatre: The Subversiveness of the Pastoral Idyll in Edward Bond's *Lear*

Abstract: The pastoral has often been defined in terms of an idyllic retreat where man can regain his former unity with nature, from which he has been alienated as a consequence of urban life. At the same time, however, the pastoral is not merely escapist, but explores the very problems of the city, contemporary society, politics and the human condition in general. It can thus be called a subversive form, serving as a vehicle to question contemporary values, roles and morals by offering a context where these issues can be freely scrutinised and criticised. A similar interest in contemporary affairs underlies the concept of the epic theatre, which, by definition, intends to create an awareness of existing social plights in the audience, thus aspiring to political reforms.

This article analyses the overlap between pastoral elements and the notion of the epic theatre using Edward Bond's *Lear* (1971). Not only will it be demonstrated how Bond uses the king's retreat into a pastoral idyll to convey his views about the origins of extreme behaviours like cruelty and violence in modern societies but also to what extent this attempt at a redefinition of received standards fits the notion of the epic theatre. Contrary to the opinion expressed by some scholars that the pastoral has become obsolete in modern times, this paper hence argues that this mode is a broad and flexible category that has survived up to the dramatic tradition of the twentieth century and is, due to its oscillation between evasiveness and subversiveness, capable of being incorporated in such a "radical" concept as Brecht's theatre.

Although many critics have already pointed out the subversive potential of Edward Bond's plays, which explore the dangers of current developments in society and question what he terms the "social morality" of his time, none of them have so far investigated how he achieves this aim by making use of features associated with the pastoral mode. While some have analysed the general function of nature in his play *Lear* (1971), they have nevertheless, in spite of mentioning the term "pastoral idyll" several times, examined neither what pastoral elements he precisely uses nor the role they play within his aim of exploring and subverting contemporary values, roles and morals (cf. Coult, Ahrens). In the following, it will be demonstrated that Edward Bond makes use of the retreat into a natural idyll to convey his views about the origins of extreme behaviour like cruelty and violence in modern societies by employing motifs specifically assigned to the pastoral. Contrary to some scholars who claim that

this mode has become obsolete in modern times,[1] this paper will argue that the pastoral is in fact a broad and flexible category that has survived up to the dramatic tradition of the twentieth century and is, due to its oscillation between evasiveness and subversiveness, even capable of being incorporated in such a "radical" concept as Brecht's epic theatre. In order to achieve this aim, the most important traits characterising the pastoral since its first occurrence in antiquity will be discussed. Against this background, the combination of pastoral and epic elements used by Edward Bond in his play *Lear* will then be analysed. Finally, conclusions will be drawn as to the extent of the overlap between pastoral modality and the notion of the epic theatre.

The pastoral has a long tradition in western literature, the roots of which can be found in ancient times. In the poems of Theocritus and Virgil, pastoral poetry is primarily concerned with the lives of shepherds and their flocks in the countryside. Typically, herdsmen meet in a so-called *locus amoenus* ("lovely place"), which is secluded from the demands of society and defined by the simplicity of the setting and people as well as its idealised surroundings. In many texts, this idealisation of country values is made explicitly as a criticism of life in the city. Usually, a tension is established between rural simplicity and innocence on the one hand and urban sophistication and corruption on the other (cf. Williams 46). Related to this idea of escapism resulting from the dissatisfaction with life in the city is the notion of the Golden Age. The dominant idea is a search for simplicity away from either a particular place (e.g., the city or the court) into the rural retreat of Arcadia or from a particular period (e.g., adulthood) into the age of childhood. The pastoral hence represents a longing for the original condition of human life in an idealised surrounding. Here, man attempts to regain his former unity with nature, from which he has been alienated as a consequence of his urban and courtly way of living (cf. Marinelli 15–36).

However, there have always been doubts regarding the possibility of such a retreat. They have been present in pastoral writings from their very beginnings taking the form of elements working against the harmony and permanence associated with life in a pastoral idyll. In Virgil's Eclogue 1, for instance, two shepherds meet against the background of a rural scenery. While Melibeous complains about his dispossession and subsequent expulsion from his native country, Tityrus praises a young man whom he refers to as deity and who allowed him to keep his land. The poem thus paradoxically establishes a tension between the celebration of the retreat into the tranquillity of a peaceful enclave

[1] Barrell and Bull, for instance, argue that pastoral writing has become impossible in the late twentieth century; according to them, there is no contrast between city and country anymore, which has always been one of the basic premises of this mode (432). However, as the analysis will show, this opposition is only one of several pastoral features that have survived since antiquity.

and the mourning for the loss of this way of living, accompanied by the knowledge that the stay in this rural context can only be a temporary one. This dichotomy between pastoral and anti-pastoral elements, the longing for a retreat into a harmonious nature and doubts about its realisability, has been a typical feature of the pastoral mode since Virgil's times.[2]

The incorporation of opposing elements already suggests that the pastoral is not a purely escapist mode celebrating simple virtues in the seclusion of a retreat completely removed from the problems of the larger world. In fact, it contains an oscillation between escapism from and, at the same time, exploration of the conditions of the city/the court. In a recent discussion, Paul Alpers argues that the pastoral has consciously modal interests insofar as it explores the strength of the shepherd, and thereby of the reader, relative to his world. In his view, "the figure of the shepherd is felt to be representative precisely in figuring every or any man's strength relative to the world" (Alpers 50). Accordingly, he sees the major function of this mode in the exploration of contemporary issues as well as the human condition in general in a distant Arcadia with the help of representative figures.

Thus, besides being an escapist form resulting from an underlying desire to escape the confinements of the modern world, the pastoral also has subversive potential. It can serve as a vehicle to question contemporary values, roles and morals by offering a context where these issues can be freely scrutinised and criticised. In the English pastoral tradition, this is often done by the motif of retreat and return: the city-dweller (or court-dweller) travels into the natural context, where he gains an insight into the larger world or the human condition in general and where the problems of the larger world are finally resolved (cf. Gifford 81–82). Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, for instance, which features a retreat from the hostility of the court into the forest of Arden, ends in the reconciliation of the brothers Orlando and Oliver, the marriage of four couples and the restoration of the throne to the exiled Duke Senior.

The search for unity and wholeness traditionally associated with the pastoral mode seems to stand in stark contrast to the concept of the epic theatre, which primarily aims at dissociation and alienation regarding both its content and form. Bertolt Brecht, who, among others, developed this kind of theatre, proclaimed its consciously political and reforming purpose. For him, its interest, unlike in earlier forms of drama, is less in what happens than in how and why it happens, a technique known as the *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect). It is an effect

[2] Cf. Leo Marx's influential work *The Machine in the Garden*, where he notes that the idyllic state associated with the pastoral ideal is often threatened by an anti-pastoral counterforce which originates either in the city or the surrounding wilderness (24–26). Likewise, Peter Lindenbaum argues that the pastoral mode posits the "pastoral ideal" as a preliminary working hypothesis which is only used as the basis for further discussion; he therefore comes to the conclusion that there is "considerable criticism and questioning of the pastoral ideal in all pastoral writing" (xi).

"which prevents the audience from losing itself passively and completely in the character created by the actor, and which consequently leads the audience to be a consciously critical observer" (Willett 91). This estrangement is achieved by a range of dramatic techniques, e.g., the direct address of the audience or a reduction of the stage equipment to only a few properties. Furthermore, despite the displacement of the action to a setting remote in time and space, the audience can be confronted with contemporary issues concerning their own society. The characters are often "everyman" figures, allegorical types that can be exchanged at random and show exemplary traits in their behaviour. With this distancing method, which prevents the viewer from submerging passively in the play and having a cathartic experience in the Aristotelian sense, the viewer is forced to assume a critical, analytical attitude, which serves to free him from the assumption that what he is watching is really a self-contained narrative (cf. Cuddon and Preston 20). Brecht hereby pursues didactic intentions; he wants the play to teach the viewer not to take its content and form for granted, since the medium itself appears, due to its extreme artificiality, dependent on many socio-cultural conditions.

The question now arises what happens when both elements co-occur, or, more specifically: if an epic play contains pastoral elements, how are they used to achieve the aim of this kind of theatre, i.e., of exposing and subverting current social and political problems? How are these elements combined with the Brechtian alienation effect? Besides, where are the overlaps between these apparently divergent forms? In the following, answers to these questions will be given by placing the focus of the analysis on Edward Bond's *Lear*, which is an adaption of Shakespeare's tragedy in a twentieth-century epic form. The play explores the origins of violence and cruelty as a result of factors such as capitalism, mass production and the anonymity of modern societies, showing how modern man, due to the estrangement from his original biological condition, subsequently turns violent. Here, the king is a paranoid monarch who builds a wall to keep out alleged enemies. When his daughters Bodice and Fontanelle rebel against him, he initially flees to the countryside; however, he soon becomes their prisoner. After being blinded, he is haunted by the ghost of the Gravedigger's boy, a countryman who has been killed by the soldiers of Lear's daughters. The wife of this boy is Cordelia, who in the course of the play starts a civil war and eventually becomes a dictator herself. In the end, Lear, who has realised the pointlessness of the system he once represented, makes a gesture towards the destruction of the wall he once began, but is killed during his attempt.

At the heart of Bond's play, there is a traditional pastoral dissatisfaction with current developments in modern society and a longing for a reunion with the original world of nature. The basic assumption is that man has been alienated

from his natural conditions due to his life in a capitalist society. Consequently, as social and political developments as well as technological progress have removed him from his natural environment which he was originally designed for, he lives in a kind of prison and turns aggressive. Bond states this explicitly in the preface to his play, where he draws a comparison between humans and animals:

> In normal surroundings and conditions members of the same species are not dangerous to one another, but . . . when they are kept in adverse conditions, and are forced to behave unnaturally, their behaviour deteriorates. This has been seen in zoos and laboratories. Then they become destructive and neurotic and make bad parents. They begin to behave like us. (lvii)

This world of violence and aggression is represented by the people at Lear's court. In the beginning, the king is depicted as a typical representative of a production-oriented, capitalist society which is not interested in the value of the individual but merely in his efficiency. He does not, for example, take pity on a worker who has just been killed but even complains about the delay in the building of the wall that is caused by the accident and has another worker executed because he thinks the working progress has been too slow (1.1). Further instances are Bodice's and Fontanelle's torture of Warrington in 1.4 or the brutality of the prisoner in 2.6, who removes Lear's eyes with a cold, scientific detachment and hopes that he will be promoted because of his eye-removing device. The usual image of a corrupted and hostile court as typical of the pastoral tradition has thus been consciously aggravated by Bond, who depicts a world that is defined by its extreme inhumanity and cruelty for the purpose of revealing the atrocities that are the result of humanity's dissociation from a more "natural" condition.

The rural enclave of the Gravedigger's boy that Lear enters after his expulsion from power at the end of act one stands in stark contrast to this courtly world of violence and corruption. Here, the typical pastoral dichotomy between country and court is used to reveal the shortcomings of the latter. After the initial scenes of violence and hostility (1.1–5), the setting already indicates the harmless and innocent character of this environment by evoking an atmosphere of natural simplicity. This becomes obvious in the stage directions at the beginning of scene 1.6: "*Wooden house upstage. A few steps to the front door. A well. A bench with bedding on it,*" and the fact that there is a forest in the background as well as a herd of pigs. It is a place where man still lives *from* nature and does not, as is the case at court, try to interfere with and control it, which is symbolised by the catalogue of technical equipment used to build the wall and hence modify nature in scene 1.1: "*A stack of building materials – shovels, picks, posts and a tarpaulin.*" Moreover, unlike at the court, where the

setting mostly consists of closed rooms, e.g., in the prison scenes in act two, which epitomises the injustice of the system of "law and order," the openness of this place conveys an atmosphere of pastoral freedom devoid of the restraints of a repressive society (cf. Ahrens 360). The Gravedigger's boy is portrayed with a natural, paradise-like happiness which is, in contrast to Lear, without violence but has also naïve and childish traits. He and his wife, who live a simple life and are caring and honest towards each other, are the opposite of the royal family, where lies are the rule and no-one can be trusted. For Lear, as well as for Bond, this setting, reminiscent of a classic *locus amoenus*, constitutes the ideal world, a Golden Age, in which people can live in accordance with nature. It has thus been consciously opposed to the human alienation and cruelty characteristic of the courtly system. Consequently, the two fundamental aspects of the epic theatre and the pastoral, i.e., alienation from and return to an unspoilt world of nature, are incorporated within one play and put into a dichotomous relation in order to show the atrocities of an inhumane system in contrast to an alternative, more "natural" existence.

Interestingly this rural context, despite its clearly idyllic description, also contains an anti-pastoral element, a poisoned well, where the dead Warrington is found. This works against the image of a natural world that has restorative powers by suggesting that the very life source of this world (water) is in fact a source of death. The image of a natural context that refuses to nurture man and kills him instead is furthermore supported by Lear's dream, in which a king has a fountain in his garden but one morning finds out that there is a desert beneath it (1.7). The fact that the king finds a helmet and a sword in the desert sand in this dream symbolises not only the hostility and emptiness of a pseudo-idyllic nature that has no healing powers in the traditional pastoral sense anymore but also anticipates the inevitable destruction of this retreat by the representatives of a larger world (the soldiers), which will occur at the end of act one. This existence of an anti-pastoral element within the idyllicism of a *locus amoenus* certainly suggests that Bond himself had, like many of his pastoral predecessors, doubts about the possibility of the flight from a powerful system into the purity of an unspoilt nature, which he perceives as an ideal but, on the whole, impossible world when it comes to the question of whether it can actually be realised. It must also be seen within the context of the epic theatre, whose fundamental aim is not to provide a pleasing context far away from any sorrows but to show the impossibility of life within such an environment in the face of a hostile and repressive system. However, this does not mean that the initial image of a pastoral idyll and a Golden Age is completely subverted. Rather, Bond's retreat shows the same oscillation between pastoral and anti-pastoral elements that has been typical of this mode since Virgil's Eclogue 1. Similarly to the ancient author, Bond probably realised that the withdrawal into the bucolic

environment can only be a temporary one but that the very act of escapism into the world of an idealised nature can nevertheless be a powerful means of undermining and transgressing the boundaries of notions associated with the contemporary system. For this purpose, he created the ambivalent image of an alternative natural context that is both subverted and subversive.

Accordingly, the rural context here serves not only as a refuge from the cruelty of modern society but also as the place where problems of this society are explored. The dichotomous relation between evasion and subversion typical of the pastoral mode becomes especially obvious in the motif of retreat and return, which reveals the way Bond combines pastoral and epic elements in order to convey his views about current issues. The movement from court to country and vice versa is made by two figures in the play, Lear and Cordelia.

Having been expelled from the court, the king enters the pastoral context for the first time at the end of act one. Here, he is suddenly depicted as extremely fragile and vulnerable. He looks, for example, so dirty and ragged that the countrymen do not recognise in him the former king anymore and the Gravedigger's boy's wife even thinks he is a tramp (1.6). Moreover, he cannot prevent the soldiers from devastating the pastoral idyll or killing the Gravedigger's boy and raping his wife. This portrayal of a vulnerable figure who was some acts before still the most powerful person is significant. Although the confrontation of two classes of people, the courtly and the rural class, is a characteristic pastoral feature and can already be found in Shakespeare's pastoral plays, e.g., *As You Like It* or *The Tempest*, it must be seen in the context of the alienation effect here, of which the interchangeability of roles and the depiction of everyman figures is typical and which reveals a major difference between Shakespeare's and Bond's version.

In the Elizabethan play, where everyone still has his firm place assigned in the chain of being, Lear remains king until the end. Although this is partly refuted by the fact that Cordelia questions the divine and patriarchal order or that Goneril and Regan undermine Lear's position as a king, the social hierarchy is not questioned as a whole or entirely subverted in the course of the play; on the contrary, chaos results from the deviation of the given structures, which are finally reconstituted by the crowing of either Albany or Edgar (depending on whether one follows the Quarto or the Folio version). Since man has no free will, he is eventually punished for his attempt to rebel against the divine order, which is epitomised by the death of Lear and his daughters. According to Lappin, Shakespeare does not aim at any social or institutional change: "The Shakespearean vision of tragedy resists the idea of revolution . . . it does not question the hierarchical reordering of power or the legitimacy of authority" (121).

In Bond's epic rewrite, the situation has changed. The king not only loses his royal status but even turns into one of the humblest figures of the play. By showing the vulnerability of the king, who is initially at the height of power but is then put into the traditional role of the pastoral farmer and unable to fight against the forces of the larger world, Bond emphasises the fact that in his play, the social order has been set up by human beings and is therefore neither unalterable nor perfect in itself. This godless world, which Lappin calls "a finite universe whose design is embodied in man-made, artificial institutions" (121), is subject to rapid changes as well as the laws of arbitrariness. The indifference of an anonymous and cruel system where individuals are easily exchangeable and dispensable prevails, which is also underlined by the speed with which Lear changes from a powerful monarch (1.1) to a weak, old man (1.5).

But the play also shows the reverse movement from country to court: Cordelia, who is raped at the end of act one by the soldiers who destroy the paradise-like idyll, is at first depicted as an innocent country wife, worried about the future with her husband and extremely vulnerable. However, after being raped and with the Gravedigger's boy having been killed, she initiates a civil war and becomes the new ruler. This again underlines the arbitrariness of a man-made system where even the humblest and most innocent person can become a representative and perpetrator of its cruelty.

Lear and Cordelia are thus figures who undergo contrary pastoral movements in the course of the play. Whereas the king is shown as powerful in the beginning, after the movement to the rural retreat he appears as a vulnerable countryman cherishing simple virtues typical of the pastoral. Cordelia, on the other hand, is initially portrayed as extremely vulnerable but has emerged as a powerful ruler of the courtly world in the end. Bond's play, despite initially portraying a simple and idyllic country that is strongly opposed to the corrupted court, reveals the closeness of both categories by showing, with the help of the Brechtian alienation effect, the ease with which one can move from one world to the other. This proximity of innocent nature and the corrupt urban society is also emphasised by the image of a vulnerable pastoral environment, e.g., when the soldiers rape Cordelia and kill the Gravedigger's boy at the end of act one.

At first sight, this combination of pastoral and epic elements seems to reveal a severe pessimism. The play appears to suggest that the escape from the restraints of the repressive system of modern society to the purity of nature in a Golden Age has become impossible, since sooner or later the forces of the larger world will invade and spoil this natural retreat. This is supported by the fact that the rural environment already contains a poisoned well, which is an anti-pastoral element and consequently works against the belief in the restorative powers of this enclave. Moreover, by depicting an innocent country wife who turns into the powerful perpetrator of an inhumane system, Bond's play implies that even

uncorrupted and simple people can quickly fall victim to this system. Even worse, the propensity for violence and cruelty is shown as an integral part of every human being. Unlike Shakespeare's play, there is no retributive justice that punishes man for deviating from a given order; instead, since no one is bound to a fixed structure anymore, everybody can fill and change any role at any time – be it the leader or the victim within a repressive system.

However, the pastoral movement of retreat and return also reveals a covert optimism or at least a suggestion of how to change the system of an inhumane society. As has been mentioned before, in the pastoral mode, the rural retreat is the place where the intruding court-figure gains insight that he or she will take back to the larger world. In Bond's play, this lesson learnt in the country is linked to the didactic aims of the epic theatre. Here, the former king, who is at first portrayed as extremely cruel and the perpetrator of a system of violence and aggression, is taught pity and compassion in the natural retreat. This becomes obvious, for example, when Lear, who ordered the execution of an innocent worker shortly before, now refers to the Gravedigger's boy's wife as "poor woman" when she cries (1.6). Not only is the Gravedigger's boy the first to show pity and compassion towards the king in the pastoral context, but he will even stay with him in the form of a ghost for nearly the rest of the play in order to offer him comfort for his sorrows, e.g., during his imprisonment. As Bond said in an interview in 1972, this illustrates that Lear, despite the destruction of the natural idyll at the end of act one, nevertheless keeps "this clear vision of a golden age" in mind (qtd. in Stratmann 295). The former king learns that the real problem is the fact that violence has become institutionalised and taken for granted in society. This in turn produces new violence, either when people try to fight against it to come into power themselves, as is the case with Cordelia, or when they have to adapt to the "morals" of this society by force (cf. Ahrens 365).

Lear finally realises that the retreat into the comforting idyllicism of a bucolic context can only be a temporary one and must be followed by a return to the courtly world of politics. He has learnt that the only way to break through the vicious circle of this depraved system is neither the quiet acceptance of its rules nor a passive withdrawal into a pastoral idyll but an active involvement in public matters: "Men destroy themselves and say it's their duty? It's not possible! How can they be so abused?" (2.7). Consequently, he turns the bucolic context into a place where revolutionaries gather and listen to his thoughts. He now becomes an active representative of a place where there is still a greater unity between man and nature and which undermines the current ideas of society as represented by the court. He finally tells Cordelia, who is about to make the same mistakes that he and his daughters made before, the final lesson he has learnt: "Our lives are awkward and fragile and we have only one thing to keep us sane: pity, and the man without pity is mad" (3.3). Despite appearing more powerless after the

removal of his eyes, Lear even demonstrates how to put into action the ideas he has learnt in the pastoral retreat. He is the first one to seek change and digs a shovel into the earth in order to remove the wall, the symbol of the inhumanity and pointlessness of the courtly ideology. His step is of course merely symbolic and more will have to follow. However, by doing this, despite being killed in the end, he shows the way that others will have to go in the future if they want to break through the vicious circle of the current system. This final gesture in which a simple figure shows exemplary behaviour that results from its retreat into the pastoral idyll must, besides the pessimism conveyed by its death, be seen within the didactic function of the epic theatre; similarly to Lear, who returns from the rural context in order to become politically active, the audience is supposed to be roused into political awareness and, in the ideal case, even aspire to social change as well as reforms.

To sum up, Edward Bond uses traditional pastoral elements in his play to construct a counter-world of an unspoilt nature which, despite its incorporation of an anti-pastoral component resulting probably from the playwright's somewhat ambivalent attitude towards the possibility of such a retreat, stands in contrast to the corrupt, capitalist society where people have turned violent and aggressive. Besides revealing an underlying escapist longing for the flight from a repressive system into the freedom of an Arcadian idyllicism, the portrayal of this retreat shows a typical pastoral tension between evasion and negotiation of contemporary issues. One of the most striking aspects is the combination of the pastoral motif of retreat and return with the Brechtian alienation effect, which emphasises Bond's view of an arbitrary, violent and godless system where individuals are dispensable and social roles easily interchangeable. In spite of the pessimistic impression that is given by the modification of this traditional motif, the rural retreat is also the place where the former representative of the cruel system gains important insights into its fallacies and an idea of how to initiate a change. In *Lear*, the pastoral enclave is thus not only the place to escape from the restraints of the modern world but also the environment where the false ideology and morals of this system are subverted and hints at the ways of how to improve its conditions are given, which corresponds to the didactic intentions of the epic theatre.

It becomes clear that the epic theatre, despite the superficial differences, shows interests similar to those of the pastoral mode by providing a displaced context where the reader/the audience can explore contemporary issues concerning an urbanised society whose system as well as politics are conceived of as the result of an alienation from a more "original" condition. In general, the form of the epic theatre itself, which aims at the dissociation from the unity and wholeness of the traditional Aristotelian theatre, represents the very estrangement it wants to expose and can thus be seen as a conscious alienation

from a "blissful" state of mere entertainment where the audience is supposed to give an emotional but also unreflecting response to the scenes it encounters on the stage. In fact, the term "alienation," by definition, establishes a dialectic relation between something that is conceived of as an original state on the one hand and something that estranges itself from it on the other. The opposition of alienation versus search for unity associated with the epic theatre and the pastoral respectively must hence be seen not as an irreconcilable discrepancy but rather as different ways of dealing with the same dilemma, since both concepts are concerned with the dissociation of man from his more "original" condition due to the system he lives in. While the pastoral deals with this alienation in terms of geographic transgression by its attempt at finding a former unity in the rural world in an idealised past, the epic theatre works at the other end of the spectrum, emphasising the very estrangement and dehumanisation of man by its use of the alienation effect in order to make the audience aware of current social plights; if both forms are combined, the resulting synthesis shows, as is the case in *Lear*, a paradoxical combination of extremely hostile and violent with idyllic and innocent elements.

Therefore, it has been exemplarily demonstrated how pastoral elements are used in the epic theatre to explore as well as challenge contemporary issues concerning society and politics. Moreover, it has become evident that the pastoral mode is not, contrary to some critics' view, an obsolete form, but a flexible category that shows interests similar to those of Brecht's epic theatre and can therefore still be found in twentieth-century drama. With its continuous oscillation between escapism on the one hand and transgression as well as subversion on the other, the pastoral is still a productive form, being an important literary means for western culture not only to negotiate its desire for an escape from an ever faster-moving, urbanised world into the purity of an unspoilt nature but also a medium to question the course this culture is taking in displaced form.

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"Seeking out Strangeness": Tony Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul*

Abstract: Tony Kushner's 1997 play *Homebody/Kabul* tells a story of an English woman who decides to leave her cozy London flat, travel to Kabul and marry a Muslim. Her English husband and daughter follow her to Afghanistan only to fall victim to all kinds of cultural misunderstandings. The play, staging multiple dislocations on personal, cultural and linguistic levels, presents characters forced to inhabit a foreign and hostile culture which they cannot describe, comprehend and, eventually, survive. By placing his protagonists in an entirely different cultural milieu from the one they were brought up in, Kushner creates a possibility for investigating the impact of cultural difference. The play dramatizes subversive power of ordinary words and everyday activities which assume disruptive potential when confronted with a foreign culture. Ultimately, Kushner's idea is to present the Western mind and identity as cultural constructs which are very difficult to transgress and negotiate.

1

Tony Kushner's 1997 play *Homebody/Kabul* tells an outlandish story of an English woman (Homebody) who suddenly decides to abandon her London flat and family and travels to Kabul. The moment the woman leaves the borders of Great Britain, she virtually disappears off the scene, supposedly being killed by the Taliban who would not tolerate a Western woman (with a discman, listening to Frank Sinatra) walking non-tourist districts of "their" city. Yet, when the search party, comprising her daughter Priscilla and husband Milton, arrives in Kabul, it turns out that Homebody may not be dead, that she actually staged her own death to mislead those who follow her and to cover up real intensions of staying in Kabul for ever. A major part of Kushner's play is, then, a drama without the protagonist, a story from which the principal character has been removed.

Homebody's absence is perhaps more meaningful and definitely more productive when it comes to moving the plot ahead than it would be with the character constantly present on stage. The search for Homebody, dead or alive, evolves into an attempt to understand her motives to leave England and her well-

organized, metropolitan life. All parties involved, and that accounts not only for her closest family but also a Pashtun official, a doctor, a local man, and a representative of the British government, discuss issues concerning a deeply felt experience of and fascination with a foreign culture, and analyze not only possible reasons for but also outcomes of this willed displacement, or rather misplacement. In general, Kushner's story dramatizes inevitable clashes that the Western mind suffers in contact with the cultural Other. *Homebody/Kabul* portrays a representative of the West who follows her dream of the East in which the Orient is viewed as more spiritual, magical and authentic than what is offered by European or American civilization. It is through the dream of the East that the woman attempts to recreate her lost identity and faith.

2

The key to understanding Homebody's decision to emigrate lies in her intellectually dense, emotionally loaded, thirty-pages long monologue which opens the play. When it was staged in New York, critics wrote about "Kabul marathon" (Simmons), appreciating its complex mixture of personal detail, historical background on Afghanistan and erudite show-off. In the monologue, Homebody tells the story of her husband's party which she wanted to organize in a way different from usual. She decided to visit a shop run by an Afghan man to buy strange hats. The encounter with the man triggers an unexpected and completely uncontrolled reaction which ultimately leads to her leaving England and starting a new life elsewhere.

In the opening section of the monologue, Homebody stresses firmly: "The subject strikes my fancy: Kabul – you will see why, that's the tale I'm telling" (9). Therefore, the play's primary aim is to explain one's obsession, to investigate a peculiar form of transgression in the process of which a Londoner suddenly develops an interest in a foreign culture: staying in one place, she lives in another. Objects collected in the Afghan shop pose as true representatives of a fascinating culture, the culture that the protagonist imagines to be richer, better, more spiritual than her own: "[T]here are shops full of merchandise from exotic locales, wonderful things made by people who believe, as I do not, as *we* do not, in magic" (10). The "magic shop" offers contact, even if limited, with the sacred and with spiritual experience which, Homebody feels, are no longer present in her native environment. Frequent visits to the shop make her understand what her life is like. A direct experience of the cultural difference opens a possibility to define, judge, criticize and reject her own lifestyle – she realizes some change

is needed. Cultural homogeneity in which she has lived so far is momentarily broken up. From the very beginning, Homebody's encounter with otherness imposes a necessity to transgress the well-composed image of the self.

However, the little Afghan curiosity shop, which the protagonist presents as an enclave of spirituality in the midst of metropolitan profanity, in the eyes of the majority turns out to be a collection of worthless junk. Unexpectedly, Homebody becomes aware of the prejudices her own culture imperceptibly imposes:

> I had seen these abbreviated fezlike pillboxy attenuated yarmulkite millinarisms, um, *hats*, I'm sorry I *will* try to stop, *hats*, yes, in a crowded shop on _____ *(Gesture)* which I must have passed and mentally noted on my way towards God knows what, who cares, a dusty shop crowded with artifacts, relics, remnants, little… doodahs of culture once aswarm with spirit matter; radiant with potent magic, the disenchanted dull detritus of which has washed up upon our culpable shores, its magic now shriveled into the safe container of *aesthetic*, which is to say, *consumer* appeal. You know, Third World Junk. (17)

It appears that what acquires aesthetic status within a given cultural context simultaneously becomes extinct and practically defunct. Once an object shifts from the routine of practical use to the sphere of purely aesthetic appreciation, it loses all its "potent magic." In other words, the interest that the Westerner exhibits in objects coming from a different culture enforces a direct and decisive change in their status and value. Kushner seems to be saying that cultural migrations are virtually impossible. What used to possess spirituality and practical usefulness, having been replanted into a foreign and hostile culture of London metropolis, can only be seen as having "consumer appeal," and be looked down upon as "Third World Junk."

Homebody understands that immediately when she enters the Afghan shop and that is how her escape away from the culture of "consumer appeal" and a journey towards "potent magic" commence. She perceives the shop and what is sold in it in terms of dislocation – the fate that she is going to meet herself: "The hats are beautiful; relatively inexpensive; sinister if you've the mind to see them that way; and sad. As dislocations are. And marvellous, as dislocations are always bloody" (18).

Homebody's fascination with the Oriental shop brings to mind what Edward Said would call "Orientalism," that is, "a system of knowledge about the Orient" (*Orientalism* 6). Undoubtedly, the visit to the shop opens up the protagonist to a new cultural experience which she has to come to terms with. It offers a perspective, unknown and mysterious, which generates a need for explanation and understanding, and thus also a new language and set of concepts. What is more, by being so strikingly different from what she knows as her native

environment, Afghan culture represented by a collection of relocated merchandise provides, again in Said's words, "deepest and most recurring images of the Other" (*Orientalism* 1). Forming a layer in her subconscious (as she stresses in her monologue: "I must have passed and mentally noted [the shop] on my way towards God knows what"; 17), this experience helps Homebody to redefine her own identity in the way similar to that in which "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient" (*Orientalism* 3). Homebody's encounter with the surrogate Afghan culture defines her by the very contrast which she feels she has to accommodate and embrace.

Homebody's opening monologue is intricately composed of the protagonist's comments and confessions as well as extensive quotes from Nancy Hatch Dupree's *An Historical Guide to Kabul*.[1] The story of the culture beginning to develop 3000 years BC is presented with the logic and neatness of the Western mind. Yet, extensive fragments which Homebody just reads directly from the book and incorporates into her own story also convey her respect and admiration towards a culture and a people with such a complex and violent history. References to historical events and great men who visited the region of the Kabul Valley (like Alexander the Macedonian or Genghis Han) play an important function. The protagonist begins to perceive Afghanistan's past as part of world history and the country itself as a place on a map which is not completely disconnected from the continents an ordinary European is able to outline. The obsessive urge to read about Afghanistan reflects the desire of her disturbed mind to form a picture and to imagine the object of her fascination.

The need to frame the "Other" in the set of new concepts in an obvious way follows the logic of "orientalist's imagination." The presentation of the narrative taken from *An Historical Guide to Kabul* ultimately dislocates the image of Afghan indigenous culture – as any guidebook story, it translates an unknown culture into simplified concepts and basic terms accessible to a Westerner. In other words, Dupree's book brings a foreign culture for display and imposes a

[1] Nancy Hatch Dupree is a world-famous art historian and archaeologist who has devoted her life to excavating and documenting Afghan art and culture. For a long time, Dupree was associated with the National Museum in Kabul. After its plundering during the Taliban rule she has been involved in a widespread search for stolen exhibits. Dupree has written five books about Afghanistan and its cultural heritage. Her historical narrative not only constitutes a major part of Kushner's opening monologue but also provides an introductory framework which helps to acquire basic concepts and categories necessary for understanding foreign, Afghan culture.

rational understanding of events and phenomena laced with magic and mystery. Therefore, what Homebody really does is produce her own version of Afghan culture, manufactured to meet the needs of her secularized and jaded existence.[2]

3

Homebody is a tourist who suddenly decides to travel outside the beaten track designed for package holidays. She disappears after the opening monologue and the rest of the play tells a story of the search undertaken by her daughter and her husband. However, the primary topic of the second part of the play is to present various forms of encounter with foreign, mysterious and violent culture that Afghanistan has developed over years of bloody conflict. The impact of "otherness" leads to various responses ranging from overwhelming fascination to absolute rejection. However, reactions to such an encounter are always presented as a sounding board for people's views; they facilitate transgression, provided a character is ready for it.

Quango,[3] a representative of the British government, is riveted by the intense experience that living in Kabul gives. It can take a purely emotional form: "I stay because Afghanistan broke my heart" (53), or, more importantly, it turns into a medical condition, leading to a state of incurable illness:

> Blew my mind. That's better. Afghanistan blew my mind. . . . to bits, and now I cannot get it back. It's like a disease, this place. (54)

The disease that the city spreads gives access to knowledge and increases awareness of its history and atrocities committed by all sides of the conflict. To a somewhat sterile and restless Western mind the experience of bloodshed and carnage that the Oriental history contains offers a purifying shock. The sickness provides a healthy perspective on the life lived in the "civilized" world of European or American cities. When Homebody's daughter goes searching for

[2] In the same way Said describes European colonial history: "European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, military, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period" (*Orientalism* 3). Homebody, as a representative of Western civilization, is presented in the process of "producing" her own version of the foreign culture.

[3] His telling name indicates an individual whose identity is partly affiliated with his native culture and partly taken over by foreignness of the local, indigenous culture. In other words, Quango is presented at a transitory stage, unsure of where he belongs. He is described as an "aid worker, unofficial liaison for the British government in Kabul" on Kushner's list of characters (3).

her mother, guided by a local man, she is moved and fascinated by what she sees. Sheer facts which Priscilla learns impose a reaction, a response, a type of experience unavailable in her ordinary life:

> Oh my God it's so good to, to stop, to draw breath. I haven't breathed since… Well for days. Oh my God I've never seen anything so… I've never travelled. Not anywhere. We were to Paris once but I didn't look. Who'd have thought Hiroshima after the bomb would look so lovely? (56)

Kushner presents Priscilla as an example of a modern tourist, that is, a person who changes places but never really travels and never allows herself to appreciate the difference. She is unable to respond to cultural diversity since she remains blind to any form of otherness that might offer itself for exploration. However, the Afghan experience leads to a slow change. The dislocation has a fertilizing effect and creates a possibility for transgressing one's stable identity. Ultimately, Priscilla sees in Kabul another Hiroshima. She is surprised to discover beauty enveloped in its dirt and destruction. More importantly, she understands that Kabul is a city sacrificed for the sake of international politics. The comparison between Kabul and Hiroshima allows her to construct a different narrative in which Afghanistan's capital appears as a tortured city and as a martyr whose suffering is made more acute for the lack of attention from the outside world.

Purified perception of her own identity as well as heightened sensitivity to places and people she encounters during her visit result from a deep appreciation of the city's suffering. It gives access to layers of feeling unavailable for ordinary Western man or woman. As Priscilla puts it:

> The twilight outside, it's… powdery. Everything feels close here, the air, the mountains, not crowding in but there's… well, proximity. Intimacy. Perfume. Like stepping into her clothes closet. I have this feeling. (66)[4]

Having left crowded streets of metropolitan London, the character discovers real intimacy, the possibility of close contact and proximity in which the world offers itself up for a different kind of exploration. Furthermore, experiencing Kabul in this way means feeling close to her absent mother, who – having no

[4] By contrast, Homebody describes life in London as a state of being imprisoned by human presence. Metropolitan life is deprived of privacy: "[I]f a thing can be said to *be*, to *exist*, then such is the nature of these expansive times that this thing which is must suffer to be *touched*. Ours is a time of connection; the private, and we must accept this, and it's a hard thing to accept, the private is gone. All must be touched. All touch corrupts. All must be corrupted" (11).

material presence – seems to speak through stones and rubble of the demolished streets and houses among which she has disappeared. The play dramatizes a sense of personalized geography. It proves that spaces rarely have objective existence. Instead, they present themselves as mixtures of the real and the imagined, as material carriers of personalized visions. When Priscilla cannot find her mother's body in any hospital in Kabul, she arrives at an absurd conclusion: "Perhaps as they moved her body from one hospital to another, perhaps at every hospital they left some piece of her. So now… she's scattered all over Kabul. The whole city. It's her" (60). The city, then, is personified as a woman while the search for her body no longer resembles a dangerous expedition into an unknown territory.

Places like Kabul or Hiroshima mentioned by Priscilla defy the fixity of cartography. They exist and do not exist on official maps, or, in other words, they dissolve into non-reality of what is being written, said or gossiped about them. Such oneiric, partly unreal, cities appear to be constructions based on how people remember them or what people wish them to be. An aura of myth and wishful thinking travels faster and further than the real image and it is its power that attracts people to visit foreign places, their home-made Meccas. Arriving in Kabul, Priscilla's mother was trying to find the legendary grave of Cain, the supposed founder of the city. Yet, because she was not sure where to look for it, she put a question mark next to the most probable location. As one of the local men says, looking at the map she was using:

> This says, not "Grave of Cain," but rather, "Grave of Cain?" She was pursuing a rumor. On no official map is there ever a question mark. This would be an entirely novel approach to cartography. The implications are profound. To read on a map, instead of "Afghanistan," "Afghanistan?" It would be more accurate, but such an accuracy as might discombobulate more than mere geography and make the hierophants of all fixed order dash madly for cover. (68)

The dislocated protagonist's search ultimately proves to be aimed at finding a source of spiritual renewal. Yet, the odyssey towards new spirituality is thwarted by the fact that religious experience cannot be precisely located; it has no fixed position nor known coordinates. It is, in other words, a cultural product, a legend or fantasy that Western nations concoct to enhance the "authentic" spirituality of the Orient. The central paradox of Homebody's predicament boils down to the fact that she travels to distant lands to look for what constitutes the crux of European biblical tradition. It is as if the visit to Afghanistan was a pilgrimage to the new Holy Land to pay respect to the shrines of dead prophets. Yet, paradoxically, Homebody is after Cain, the man guilty of fratricide, the first murderer, the biblical incarnation of jealousy and bloodthirsty desire for

revenge. Her fate seems to be doomed from the very start as she turns into another victim of the cursed city and its founder.

To attach this biblical image to the city of Kabul means to place a mark of death on its history, to confine its past and present identity to the narrow walkway of murder and carnage. As Kushner stresses:

> I was moved by the fact that the city of Kabul was Cain's resting place. In the play I suggest that he was, perhaps, murdered there. Over the centuries, so many people have died in Kabul, in Afghanistan, the number of the slain in the last four decades perhaps exceeding all those who had fallen in all centuries before. (Afterword 148)

It would be hard to find a better example to illustrate how a Western man develops his understanding of an Oriental territory and culture. Kushner's play presents a mixture of fact and fiction, of modern history and ancient mythology. His story occupies a liminal space between real events and their imagined roots. It is a narrative in which the content of current affairs broadcast worldwide by press agencies is explicated with the symbolism of biblical imagery. As Kushner mentions in his comments about the play, the legend about Cain's death in Kabul

> has a resonance in the Holy Scriptures in which we are told that Cain's sons, Jabal, Jubal and Tubalcain, were the human race's first musicians and metalsmiths. There is attached to this destroyer, this hunter, this solitary, desperate, cursed figure of ultimate barrenness, some potential for that renewal of life which is human creativity. Cain is the founder of a city as well as a fratricide, the father of the arts as well as the first person to usurp God's power of determining mortality, the first person to usurp the role of the angel of death. (Afterword 148)

The double symbolism of the Cain figure is paralleled with the dubious status of the British, among other nations, who have been present in the region since the early nineteenth century.[5] Regardless of whether they were about to reinstate peace or bring about war, their involvement inevitably meant colonial

[5] One of the most powerful techniques in Kushner's repertoire is to use biblical imagery to circulate political agenda. Therefore, his practical interventions, which use religious imagery and frequent references to Jewish background and mystical wisdom, deflect criticism for staying on the surface of political reality. Such deliberately provocative images can be used as ammunition to wage wars for equality and democracy – Kushner's favourite values. In one of his manifesto essays, before admitting: "I am a homosexual, after all," he writes the following: "At any other time spit's nasty, but when you kiss it is… well, nectar, nepenthe, gone over from spit to nepenthe in a transubstantiation more divine than that accomplished in any Holy Mass" ("Fick Oder Kaputt!" 13).

domination. Its sad remnants mark local spaces with indelible signs of fraternal and genocidal conflict. Sharing moral ambiguity with Cain's life, many British soldiers found their final resting place in Afghanistan:

> KHWAJA. Several hundred British soldiers were slaughtered here in 1841. This pillar marks the –
> PRISCILLA. We already passed the pillar for the… the soldiers, hours and hours ago. Are we going in circles?
> KHWAJA. There are many pillars, many slaughtered British soldiers. (55)

The juxtaposition of two temporal dimensions in which the present is distanced in a Brechtian manner by the historical perspective, revealing a long tradition of the Western colonial presence and failed attempts to intervene in the region, is presented as a significant factor in understanding both Homebody's and Priscilla's characters.[6] On the one hand, Kushner wants to stress the fact that his female protagonists belong to a similar tradition of Oriental conquest in which the distant territory and exotic locations are subject to both intellectual, philosophical or religious reinterpretation and material or geographic subjugation. On the other hand, the characters are presented as drastically opposed to the creeds of the civilization represented by the notorious British soldiers of 1841. Actually, the play emerges as a tribute to the richness and spiritual depth of indigenous Afghan culture and as a striking reminder that the Western world has long forgotten its religious and cultural roots. Homebody's journey from London to Kabul, fuelled by her burning interest in Afghan history and folklore, signifies a reversed colonial impulse, a form of positive Orientalism which elevates and idealizes native cultures and traditions, instead of placing them at a lower level of social or civilizational advancement. Therefore, if a typical colonial attitude towards the Oriental Other was to deprive it of its history, to imagine its inhabitants as "people without History" (Said, *Culture* 63–64), *Homebody/Kabul* presents a reversed situation in which native Afghan history is returned its proper place and given back central importance in the annals of world's historiography. Furthermore, if one was to follow Said's contention that in the eyes of Western man the Oriental "reality has not historically and culturally required attention" (*Culture* 63–64), Kushner's act of

[6] Kushner's enthusiasm for Brecht has both political and artistic roots: "I read the *Short Organum*, which is the point at which I fell completely in love with Brecht. I read all of *Brecht on Theater*. The *Short Organum* was a kind of revelation for me. It was the first time I believed that people who are seriously committed political intellectuals could have a home in the theater, the first time I believed theater, really good theater, had the potential for radical intervention, for effectual analysis. The things that were exciting me about Marx, specifically dialectics, I discovered in Brecht, in a wonderful witty and provocative form" (Kushner qtd. in Vorlicky 106).

rebellion against tradition boils down to the fact that the playwright directs his interest and careful attention towards this native culture in a sort of apologetically affirmative gesture. In the image of the idealised Afghanistan and the portrayal of its sophisticated culture one may see the guilty conscience of a writer who is famous for siding with various oppressed minorities and who is blatantly outspoken in his criticism of the Bush administration.[7]

4

Homebody/Kabul premiered in 1999 (Chelsea Theatre Centre, London) but its most powerful and moving production was given by New York Theatre Workshop in December 2001 (directed by Declan Donnellan). One of the reasons for the spectacular publicity that the production received was the fact that it was staged a few months after the attacks on the World Trade Center. In an obvious way, the play which originated largely as a literary fantasy immediately turned into an open statement on the relations between the two cultures. Its politics was suddenly pushed to the fore; it captured the spirit of the moment and planted a firm statement in the debate on the alleged "clash of civilizations." As one of the reviewers observed about the heroine of the play:

> It was in December 2001 to be exact – only weeks after the events of 9/11 forever transformed New York's sense of itself – that she was introduced to Manhattan audiences as the title character of Tony Kushner's "Homebody/Kabul". For many of us this graciously awkward woman of flighty, elliptical speech and ineffable convictions offered warming comfort in a world that had taken on a newly aggressive chill. (Brantley)

The very presentation of the cultural exchange between the Muslim world and Western culture, the idea that the Afghanistan ruled by the Taliban had once had a highly sophisticated history, must have been seen by many as ludicrous when the global conflict was just tearing the two worlds wide apart. However, it is precisely this appreciation of difference and the ability to transgress the here and now of the current situation that constitute the theme of the play, which was most clearly visible at the time of fierce hostility between cultures.

[7] As a vociferous commentator of American politics, Kushner is on record as saying that George W. Bush is a "feckless blood-spattered plutocrat" (Afterword 145) or even more drastically suggesting that "Bush or Reagan or a Hitler or the Neo-Nazi skinheads who are now beating up disabled people in Germany, that these people are really just part of the human community, and that there is some way… you should be able to convince them of the inappropriateness of their system and reason them out of their evil behavior" (qtd. in Vorlicky 33).

In the play's afterword, Kushner elaborates on the form of cultural relocation which results from personal grief and discomfort. Homebody's gesture of refusal to participate in the life of the Western civilization is elevated to a parable of human fate:

> *Homebody/Kabul* is a play about Afghanistan and the West's historic and contemporary relationship to that country. It is also a play about travel, about knowledge and learning through seeking out strangeness, about trying to escape the unhappiness of one's life through an encounter with Otherness, about narcissism and self-referentiality as inescapable booby traps in any such encounter; and it's about a human catastrophe, a political problem of global dimensions. It's also about grief. (Afterword 142)

The story of a London woman exemplifies a universal history of Western civilization in which men and women in a narcissistic and egocentric way seek strangeness and knowledge by travelling and conquering foreign lands. Yet, it can also be read as an image of a "human catastrophe" of personal and global proportions in which people plagued by grief and tragedy find themselves forced out of home. Kushner, for whom being Jewish seems to be equally about precarious personal experience and about a strange historical predicament, subtly weaves the motif of the Wandering Jew into his play.[8]

The play ends with a change of places between Homebody and Mahala, a Muslim woman who travels to London with Homebody's family to replace her in the very same house, the very same chair. She has been expelled from her native Afghan community for being too learned, too liberal and too outspoken. Pronounced mad, the woman seizes the first available opportunity to travel to a western country. Yet, her first truly free and spontaneous decision on arrival in London is to begin reading an English translation of the Quran, the very symbol of the culture she fled from.

The play comes full circle with the last scene. It is under the influence of changed cultural conditions that the two female characters find their homes. Homebody marries a Muslim man and Mahala occupies her new London house, returning to a regular contact (through an English translation) with religion, which allows her to say: "I am myself becoming a Muslim again" (137). It is significant that the last section of the play is called "Periplum," a term taken

[8] For Kushner, contemporary Jewishness is a category not necessarily connected with a particular religious or political situation; it rather is a general condition of the mind or a specific perspective from which the world is viewed (vide *Angels in America*). As he says in one of the interviews: "[W]e are not a religion, it makes everyone uneasy to think of us as a race, including Jews, it's very odd; we've wound up being the oddest phenomena in modern history" (qtd. in Vorlicky 83).

from Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, standing for a human perspective in writing history. It does not refer to a map made by cartographers who traditionally occupy a privileged position with a full bird's-eye view at their disposal, but instead it signifies an individual's position in comprehending reality.[9] Homebody's story seen in this light serves as a stark reminder that history is ultimately written by individuals against larger, hegemonic discourses, narratives or ideas.

The Muslim woman in London attains full cultural integration. She stays in Homebody's house and takes care of her garden. She reads her books and speaks of self-fulfilment:

> It is lovely here. I am gardening now! To a Kabuli woman, how shall I express what these English gardens mean? Your mother is a strange lady; to neglect a garden. A garden shows us what may await us in Paradise. (139–40)

It is through "seeking out strangeness" that Kushner's characters discover their new identity. It should then be read as a true sign of cultural transgression (but also productive, cultural integration with the Other) that a Muslim woman feels obliged to teach the English how to maintain their gardens.

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[9] Kushner's play is preceded with quotes from a number of different authors, providing a broad cultural context for the play that follows. Hugh Kenner is cited on the concept of periplum in Pound's poetry: "»Periplum« is Pound's shorthand for a tour which takes you round then back again. And such a tour is by definition profitable, if not in coins then in knowledge" (Kushner, *Homebody* 8).

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The Silencing of Dissent: Harold Pinter's Bleak Political Vision

Abstract: The article centres upon one of Harold Pinter's last plays, *Celebration*, first performed at the Almeida Theatre, London, on 16 March 2000. Similarly to *Party Time*, a dystopian political play written almost a decade earlier, *Celebration* pursues the theme of a sheltered zone of power effectively marginalising a social "other." This time, however, Pinter adopts the mode of comedy to dramatise the fragile and circumscribed existence of dissent and the moral coarseness of complacent elites. The article traces a number of intriguing analogies between *Celebration* and Pinter's explicitly political plays of the 1980s and 1990s dealing with the suppression of dissident voices by overwhelming structures of established power. It is demonstrated how – despite the play's fashionable restaurant setting, ostensibly far removed from the torture sites of *One for the Road*, *Mountain Language* and *The New World Order* – Pinter succeeds in relating the insulated world of *Celebration* to the harsh reality of global oppression. What is significant, I argue here against interpreting the humorous power inversions of the social behaviour in *Celebration* as denoting any fundamental changes in larger sociopolitical structures. It is rather suggested that the play reveals the centrality of Pinter's scepticism about the possibility of eluding, subverting or curtailing the silencing force of entrenched status quo, implying perpetual nature of contemporary inequities of power. I also look at how the representatives of the empowered in-group in the play contain transgressing voices and resort to language distortion to vindicate oppression.

Harold Pinter's political playwrighting meant to disturb. Whereas political drama, as traditionally defined, seeks to alter audience opinion and behaviour by offering an articulated and "constructive" critique of problematic social matters it addresses,[1] Pinter did not seem to perceive political problems of the kind he

[1] In *British and Irish Political Drama in the Twentieth Century*, D. I. Rabey defines political drama as follows: "'*Political* drama' emphasises the directness of its address to problematic social matters, and its attempt to interpret these problems in political terms. Political drama communicates its sense of these problems' avoidability, with implicit or explicit condemnation of the political circumstances that have allowed them to rise and continue to exist (just as Brecht identifies *The Rise of Arturo Ui* as *Resistible*). In perceiving social problems as avoidable, political drama is necessarily diverging from the worldview that the agents of the status quo would seek to impose for the continued smooth running of society in its present form" (1–2). Furthermore, Rabey acknowledges that it is useful to discriminate between "the comparative aims and styles of political *drama* (or plays) and political *theatre*," for which Sandy Craig has proposed an interesting "working definition" in "Unmasking the Lie: Political Theatre" (6). In this essay, Craig ascribes the difference to a playwright's stance towards the audience: "[T]he important feature

dramatised as avoidable and endorsed no positive ideologies or methodologies of change. The sketchy nature of oppositional values in his writing indicated the artist's distance from other "committed" playwrights of his generation and accentuated his deep-rooted political pessimism. There seems to be little hope for dissent and subversion in Pinter's political vision, only the call for it. In his political output of the 1980s and 1990s, the dramatist portrays power structures that appear invulnerable to subversive critique and stages the triumph of power in stifling protest. Dissidents in his plays are marginalised in a varied and often vicious fashion, while the official power is renewed and strengthened. The plays ostensibly intimate the insignificance of individual experience against a tenacious and complacent status quo; they challenge Pinter audiences to contemplate the futility of progressive action.

This article focuses on Pinter's last full-length play, a comedy entitled *Celebration*, first presented under the author's direction at the Almeida Theatre on 16 March 2000. It aims to investigate certain disquieting parallels between *Celebration*, described by Billington as one of "the funniest, feistiest" among Pinter's pieces ("Space"), and the artist's explicitly political plays of the 1980s and 1990s dealing with the ruthless suppression of dissident voices by overwhelming structures of established power. It demonstrates how – despite the play's smart restaurant setting – Pinter connects the smugly insular world of *Celebration* with the grim facts of political violence practised worldwide. Importantly, the article will argue against interpreting the comic power inversions of social behaviour in *Celebration* as indexing essential changes in larger sociopolitical structures. Rather it will be suggested that the play reveals the centrality of Pinter's scepticism about the possibility of subverting or escaping the silencing, repressive force of the self-righteous status quo, implying perpetual nature of contemporary inequities of power.

In a number of ways, *Celebration* is reminiscent of *Party Time*, a dystopian political play written almost a decade earlier. Set in a luxurious apartment, *Party Time* centres upon an exclusive party of the ruling elite – a chilling "society of beautifully dressed people," connoisseurs of "elegance, style, grace, [and] taste" – gathered to feast whilst roadblocks, checkpoints and round-ups deal with the

which distinguishes political plays from political theatre is this: political plays seek to appeal to, and influence, the middle class, in particular that section of the middle class which is influential in moulding 'public opinion.' The implication of this is that society can be reformed and liberalised, where necessary, by the shock troops of the middle class – and, of course, such people are influential in campaigns and reform. But further, political plays in bourgeois theatre implicitly realise that the middle class remains the progressive class within society. Political theatre, on the other hand, as embodied in the various political theatre companies, aims – with varying degrees of success – to appeal to, and be an expression of, the working class. Its underlying belief is that the working class is the progressive class within society" (30–31).

public outside, efficiently restoring "[a] cast-iron peace" (*Party Time* 299, 293).[2] Similar to *Party Time*, *Celebration* pursues the theme of a hermetic zone of power effectively marginalising a social "other." This time, however, Pinter adopts the mode of comedy to dramatise the precarious and circumscribed existence of dissent and the moral bankruptcy of complacent elites that have apparently dispensed with critical self-awareness. The edge of Pinter's incisive satire is directed here in particular at the nouveau riche whose vulgarity is not disguised by their ostentatious opulence.

The comedy begins in a relatively straightforward manner. There are two tables of diners, two celebrations. At the smaller table, Russell, an investment banker, celebrates his recent promotion with his wife, Suki, an ex-secretary who now teaches infants. At the larger table, a wedding anniversary is being loudly feted by a group of former East Enders. The crass Lambert is treating his wife, Julie, and his brother, Matt, married to Prue, Julie's sister, to a gourmet dinner in "the most expensive fucking restaurant in town" (18). The brothers are influential businessmen and their wives run charities. Yet they are all arrogant and predatory; they enjoy mockery and insulting one another. The revellers remain seated almost throughout, visited by the owner, Richard, and the hostess, Sonia, who engage in general owner-host inquiries, and by an exceptionally loquacious Waiter. Towards the end of the play, Suki and Russell briefly join the other table. Lambert picks up everyone's tab and all exit, excepting the Waiter.

As in previous Pinter plays, it soon transpires that special occasions – birthday parties, tea parties, homecomings – are not quite what they seem (Raby 58). The couple at the smaller table taunt each other with past and present infidelities, trading suggestive innuendoes until Russell eventually calls his wife "a whore" (13) and, a moment later, "a prick" (14). At the other banquet table, Julie, embittered by her husband, tells Lambert to "go and buy a new car and drive it into a brick wall" (11). Lambert reveals to his brother that "[a]ll mothers want to be fucked by their mothers," to which Matt responds: "Or by themselves" (17). When Prue, his wife, corrects him: "No, you've got it the wrong way round," Matt retorts: "All mothers want to be fucked by their sons" (17). The more they drink, the more unsavoury the revelations that crawl out from the past and the more outrageous the invectives hurled. Clearly, in conceit and shallow crudity, the diners surpass even those in *Party Time*: they cannot recall what they ordered for dinner (3–4) or whether they have just seen an opera, a ballet or a play (19–20). Like in *Party Time*, women in *Celebration* tend to be debased by males. And the part of the transgressive speaker who poses a threat to an evening of vulgar conviviality is here taken by the far-from-dumb Waiter intimating a world of eccentric otherness far beyond comprehension of

[2] Where words have been deleted from the quotations from Pinter's plays, the ellipsis is in square brackets ([. . .]) to distinguish these omissions from Pinter's own ellipses in the text.

the self-interested clique. The Waiter's desperate struggle to keep from being invisible and insinuate himself into a conversation with the influential guests only points up his social impotence.

On the face of it, power relations in the world of *Celebration* have been inverted, at least in some respects, for both women and men seem able to exercise power and have resort to force. At one point, allying herself with Julie against their husbands, Prue vouches for her sister's veracity by asserting: "I've known her all my life [. . .] since we were little innocent girls" – an intimation that no innocence remains – "when [. . .] we used to lie in the nursery and hear mummy beating the shit out of daddy" (21). Her recollection is verified with "We saw the blood on the sheets the next day" (21), a hint that these women have been trained in abuse since childhood. Indeed, what all the women in *Celebration* have in common is the ability to stand their ground; not one despairs, wallows in self-pity, cringes to insult or shies away from attack. In another inversion of traditional power relationships, while expatiating upon his professional success, Russell concedes that he has been manipulated and exploited by his secretary: "They're all the same, these secretaries, these scrubbers. They're like politicians. They love power. They've got a bit of power, they use it. They go home, they get on the phone, they tell their girlfriends, they have a good laugh" (7). Ostensibly repentant, he continues: "I'm being honest. You won't find many like me. I fell for it. I've admitted it. She just twisted me round her little finger" (7), pleading innocence in terms of his alleged powerlessness.

One may infer from such humorous reversals of power in the play that a certain mobility within social hierarchy is plausible. The representatives of the working or lower middle class seem to have gained the power of the moneyed classes while women appear to enjoy the power once restricted to men. The husbands even express regret at some of their stereotypically callous demeanour and seem willing to display greater sensitivity and empathy. Matt declares his fellow feeling for their efficient *maîtresse d'hôtel* when Sonia ventures a story of her tragic love life and extinct passion (47). Russell discloses he once wanted to be a poet and identifies paternal rejection as the source of his insecurity: "But I got no encouragement from my dad. He thought I was an arsehole" (29). In a relatively uncommon accurate appraisal of a present self for a Pinter character, Lambert asserts he is going to make it his job to live again and "come back as a better person, a more civilised person, a gentler person, a nicer person" than he is, which is capped with Julie's "Impossible" (56). However, the abuse of authority and violence have not ceased to exist; only the specific identities of oppressors and the oppressed have become more variable.

Indeed, though tempting, it would be erroneous, it seems, to see the comic reversals of the social behaviour in *Celebration* as pointing to some fundamental

and durable transpositions of power in larger sociopolitical structures. Even given that women exercise greater influence at local levels of social interaction – within marriage, the family and small business – there is an inviolable, overarching form of patriarchal authority whose firm hold intimates that control has been reapportioned only in a superficial manner. When Lambert salutes his conception of life as a competition: "May the best man win!" (62), Julie and Prue concur with one another, proclaiming that "[t]he woman always wins" (62, 63), which Suki regards as "good news" (63). And yet, manifestly, these wives are still kept women, oblivious to, and, perhaps, deliberately misinformed about their husbands' financial operations. They enjoy comfort and prosperity, enduring their marginalisation by holding ground, retaliating or adroitly sidetracking their spouses' biting comments, the main form of attention the partners in these marriages bestow upon one another. But they nonetheless initiate little action in the larger, male-governed world in which brutality endures and where money plainly remains in the hands of the well-established power elite. While Russell is a financier, Lambert and Matt are "[s]trategy consultants" whose surreptitious business dealings entail force even if they do not have to carry guns (60).

Aside from the witty power inversions, *Celebration* owes much of its wild humour to the impossible social aspirations of the loutish banqueters, the ribald behaviour of the overdressed women, Prue and Julie, and, above all, the three extraordinary monologues "interjected" by the Waiter (30). These increasingly bizarre, name-dropping tales centre around the Waiter's remarkable grandfather, who seems to have been acquainted with all the early- and mid-twentieth-century luminaries in literature, Hollywood, the arts and politics. It is the Waiter who is ultimately banished from the club of the rich and privileged, left stranded in the empty restaurant as the powerful businessmen and their trophy wives return to the world they control.

The Waiter's "interjections" persistently channel the diners' attention to a realm of cultural achievement, both modernist and popular, effectively underscoring the crudity of the restaurant's parvenu customers. Saying that that he overheard the diners mention T. S. Eliot, the Waiter professes his grandfather "knew T. S. Eliot quite well. [. . .] I'm not claiming that he was a close friend of his. But he was a damn sight more than a nodding acquaintance" (31). The Waiter continues, supplying a roster of acclaimed British and American poets and writers his grandfather allegedly knew in the early decades of the twentieth century, many of Pinter's acknowledged favourites:

> He knew them all in fact, Ezra Pound, W. H. Auden, C. Day Lewis, Louis MacNeice, Stephen Spender, George Barker, Dylan Thomas and if you go back a few years he was a bit of a drinking companion of D. H. Lawrence, Joseph Conrad, Ford Maddox Ford, W. B. Yeats, Aldous Huxley, Virginia Woolf and Thomas Hardy in his dotage. (31)

Moreover, the grandfather could have been slated for

> Chancellor of the Exchequer or [. . .] First Lord of Admiralty but he decided instead to command a battalion in the Spanish Civil War, but as things turned out he spent most of his spare time in the United States where he was a very close pal of Ernest Hemingway – they used to play gin rummy together until the cows came home. (31)

The list of household-name greats in literature stretches to absurd proportion and culminates in a fantastic impossibility:

> [H]e was also boon compatriots with William Faulkner, Scott Fitzgerald, Upton Sinclair, John Dos Passos – you know – that whole vivid Chicago gang – not to mention John Steinbeck, Erskine Caldwell, Carson McCullers and other members of the old Deep South conglomerate. [. . .] He stood four square in the centre of the intellectual and literary life of the tens, twenties and thirties. He was James Joyce's godmother. (31)

The Waiter carries on with his cultural history lesson, moving forward in the twentieth century with a second interjection about his grandfather's familiarity with "the old Hollywood film stars back in those days," saying that his relative "used to knock about with Clark Gable and Elisha Cook Jr and he was one of the very few native-born Englishmen to have hit it off with Hedy Lamarr" (49). The Waiter apparently fails to discern varieties of social difference, levelling all cases of otherness in his description of the "well-established Irish Mafia" in Hollywood: "Al Capone and Victor Mature for example. They were both Irish. Then there was John Dillinger the celebrated gangster and Gary Cooper the celebrated film star. They were Jewish" (50). Incidentally, the Waiter's introduction of violence in his mention of Hollywood's "Mafia" and their friendships among "famous Irish gangsters in Chicago" (50) seems to reflect both Pinter's own youthful infatuation with American gangster films and the artist's restless investigation of violence and its causes in his oeuvre. "They were Jewish" may also recall Fascist attacks on Pinter as a young Jew in the post-war East End, along with the resonances of the World War II Holocaust (Billington, *Life* 17–18).

Later still, this time in front of his employer, the Waiter invokes the previous century's armed conflicts and political leaders with his references to "the Austro-Hungarian Empire" (65), again hauling out his grandfather, who was "an incredibly close friend of the Archduke himself and [who] once had a cup of tea with Benito Mussolini. They all played poker together, Winston Churchill included" (65). The character of the Waiter, whose peculiarly discursive, all-embracing speeches conjoin World Wars I and II, is evidently used here by Pinter to suggest that political violence was an ineluctable feature of the twentieth century.

While the Waiter's rambling reminiscences bring the disturbing early- and mid-twentieth-century history into play, the interactions among the Waiter, his employers and their wealthy clientele evince a more contemporary, capitalist form of subjection and exploitation. The restaurant staff, who desperately need their jobs, are made humiliatingly dependent on the generosity of their employers and customers. Keenly aware of their replaceability, they live in a state of constant insecurity. Clearly, the fact that the empowered consumers occasionally tolerate the fawning underlings' interjections does not entail their readiness to allow for the actual subversion of their position. When the interfering Waiter oversteps the bounds in his attempts to assert himself, the banqueters immediately quell his transgressive monologue by shutting him out. The Waiter's acute sense of dependency and susceptibility emerges in his comments on the almost umbilical connection linking him to his workplace. When Russell brushes aside one of the Waiter's interpolations with: "Have been working here long?" and asks: "You going to stay until it changes hands?" (32), the Waiter takes it as a threat of dismissal and responds apprehensively: "Are you suggesting that I'm about to get the boot?" (32). Unlike his customers, the Waiter openly admits his inadequacies: "To be brutally honest, I don't think I'd recover if they did a thing like that. This place is like a womb to me. I prefer to stay in my womb. I strongly prefer that to being born" (32–33).[3] This honest divulging of one's vulnerabilities, definitely uncommon for a Pinter character, evokes some sympathy in its candour.

The last of the Waiter's interpositions transmutes the biting comedy into something much more sombre. Even though he is not booted out of his job, the Waiter is conspicuously debarred from the world dominated by those he waits on. As the strategy consultants and investment bankers jointly depart to resume their affairs of the world, he remains forlorn in the desolate restaurant. The Waiter's sense of exclusion manifests itself in his painful confession:

> When I was a boy my grandfather used to take me to the edge of the cliffs and we'd look at the sea. He bought me a telescope. [. . .] I used to look through this telescope and sometimes I'd see a boat. [. . .] Sometimes I'd see people on the boat. A man, sometimes a woman, or sometimes two men. [. . .] My grandfather introduced me to the mystery of life and I'm still in the middle of it. I can't find the door to get out. (72)

[3] It could be argued that in this passage Pinter teases those among his critics who pigeonholed him as an absurdist – as opposed to a political writer – and who saw his rooms primarily as places of retreat and protection, akin to the womb as the ultimate shelter, by flaunting these ideas so ostentatiously on the surface of the play (see, for instance, Merritt 172–73). Intriguingly, the characters in *Celebration* also hint at some other themes and motifs commonly associated with the "Pinteresque." Suki, for instance, insists on the filtering of the past into the present: "I sometimes feel the past is never past" (56), whereas Lambert expounds on the tragedy of human existence according to the absurdist model by which all individuals are isolated entities unable to know and relate to others (64).

These genuinely puzzled words clearly suggest that the Waiter finds himself walled in and incapacitated: he can neither see a way out of his life nor participate fully in it. The play's concluding moments further accentuate his entrapment and ineffectuality. The Waiter moves to make his last abortive bid for articulation: "And I'd like to make one further interjection. *He stands still. Slow fade*" (72). Even if the externally dictated restrictions on his self-expression are plainly acknowledged by the Waiter, the character's ultimate stillness demonstrates his impotence. Once again, Pinter dramatises the rigorously demarcated and shrinking space accorded to voices that conflict with the established order.

In his overtly political output, Pinter relentlessly explores and exposes the ways in which the empowered groups control and pervert public discourse. First of all, the functionaries of his repressive regimes effectively muffle opposition by rhetorically marginalising its ideas and vocabulary. In Pinter's post-1980s political plays and sketches, language is the attribute of authority, "the voice of God" (*One for the Road* 227), defined by those in power who do almost all the talking while dissent is made abject or criminalised. Moreover, those whose beliefs and actions appear discordant with the perceived social orthodoxy are silenced in another way: the ruling elites take advantage of the pliability of language, claiming positive ideals as excuses for repression. Terms such as "freedom," "democracy," "peace," "morality" – divorced from their original meanings – become rhetorical tokens by means of which existing power structures are legitimised and preserved. Indeed, one of the most provocative insights Pinter affords in such torture plays as *The Hothouse*, *One for the Road*, *Mountain Language* and *The New World Order* is that the perpetrators of brutal deeds regard themselves not as inhumane tyrants but as agents of an ideology that is transparently legitimate and moral, even when the measures taken to implement it are evidently cruel. Nicolas, a self-righteous interrogator in *One for the Road*, does not authorise murder, battering and rape but is one of the "patriots" who "share a common heritage" (232) and whose "business" is "to keep the world clean for God" (246). Likewise, Lionel and Des, two ruthless henchmen of a despotic regime in *The New World Order*, do not inflict torture on their mute and blindfolded victim but, mystifying their brutality through the language of cleansing, they insist they are "keeping the world clean for democracy" (277).

Intriguingly, even though the self-satisfied males in *Celebration* are not sadistic torturers or tyrannical officers of military regimes, they resort to a similar distortion of language to justify abuses of power. Matt and Lambert, at the top of the thriving "strategic consultancy business" (62), chillingly pride themselves on being responsible for "[k]eeping the peace" worldwide (60). These power-brokers of the world who supply weapons and contrive strategies

of destruction in exchange for exorbitant sums of money only vaguely allude to the nature of their work. Their business is conducted clandestinely except for those in the club who have the funds and know-how necessary to enter the play. Russell, as a banker with money behind the traffic in lethal strategies, postulates, drawing upon doublespeak clichés: "We need a few more of you about. [. . .] Taking responsibility. Taking charge. Keeping the peace. Enforcing the peace. Enforcing peace" (61). Networking to further his own economic advantage, he attempts to affiliate himself with Matt and Lambert: "I'm moving any minute to a more substantial bank. I'll have a word with them. I'll suggest lunch. In the City. I know the ideal restaurant. All the waitresses have big tits" (61). The play's closing move, wedding "peace-keeping" with force, money and sex, apparently unites all these powerful males.

Robert Gordon found the somewhat subdued finale of *Celebration* "surprisingly moving, expressing the shared incomprehension of the audience and the Waiter, implicated in a cultural moment from which there appears to be no escape" (71). Having been exposed to the Waiter's witty false-memory interjections about people who shaped the previous century, the audience look forward to more of his tales. The dramatist, however, intentionally withholds the hoped-for words. In the brutal politics of a Pinter play, language is the privilege of the powerful. The Waiter's muteness seems to be another engulfing silence strongly reminiscent of those marking Pinter's dystopian dramatisations of inhumane power structures in the 1980s and 1990s.

The gruesome persistence of contemporary abuses of authority and social injustice is implied in Lambert's sinister prediction: "Plenty of celebrations to come. Rest assured. [. . .] Dead right!" (69). It seems that Pinter's dramatisation of the impervious, perennially closed system of oppressive power which effectively hems in the Waiter in *Celebration* bears some relation to Herbert Marcuse's views on the functioning of advanced technological civilisation and its capacity to isolate, absorb and appropriate whatever is subversive or oppositional. In *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse suggests that whereas technologically developed capitalist society, characterised by "a comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic unfreedom" (1), needs the critique of art, art and culture have been integrated into the "technological universe" and institutionalised in such a way that their potential to effect qualitative change will never be realised (xvi). Even if subversive forces and tendencies are granted space in the established universe of discourse, they are quickly digested by the status quo, contained and made void.[4] Such a dynamic – being allowed to

[4] For relevant comments concerning "the remarkable ability" displayed by bourgeois society throughout its history to "absorb and appropriate" subversive energies directed against it, see, for instance, Booker 7–8.

express oneself but culminating in futility – definitely typifies the Waiter in *Celebration.*

The fashionable restaurant setting of *Celebration* and the grim torture chambers of Pinter's political plays like *One for the Road*, *Mountain Language* and *The New World Order* are seemingly worlds apart. Yet the Waiter's final summary catalogue, which eventually prompts the banqueters to intervene and muffle the transgressive speaker, effectively connects the exclusive club of the influential socialites to the brutal realities of global oppression. The Waiter insists that his grandfather was "everything men aspired to be in those days. [. . .] He was full of good will. He'd even give a cripple with no legs crawling on his belly [. . .] a helping hand. [. . .] He was like Jesus Christ in that respect" (66). Next, he launches his last grandiose declamation of twentieth-century poets, playwrights, writers, composers, painters, cricket players, pop singers and comedians:

> He [the grandfather] loved the society of his fellows, W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, Igor Stravinsky, Picasso, Ezra Pound, Bertholt Brecht, Don Bradman, the Beverley Sisters, the Inkspots, Franz Kafka and the Three Stooges. He knew these people where they were isolated, where they were alone, where they fought against pitiless and savage odds, where they suffered vast wounds to their bodies, their bellies, their legs, their trunks, their eyes, their throats, their breasts, their balls— (66)

At this harrowingly anatomical juncture, Lambert stands up and shuts the speaker off, rendering the Waiter invisible by turning to the owner and addressing him patronisingly by his first name: "Well, Richard – what a great dinner" (66), a liberty the host would not dare to take in return, which betokens the hierarchy's tight grasp. The vast bodily wounds itemised by the Waiter suggest the effects of torture. The painstaking exactitude of the recitation makes it plain to the guests and the audience alike how horrifyingly facile it is to inflict suffering and mutilate a human body. What is significant, the Waiter's catalogue encompasses here not the victims of torture but mainly artists whose rejection was more a question of modernist alienation or misappreciation than of actual physical torment. Apparently, as has been rightly noted by Grimes, in this passage Pinter not only seeks to reawaken the audience to the brutal facts of exclusion and political victimisation but he also provocatively fuses the marginalised artist with the marginalised victim of political persecution (133). The diners in *Celebration* instantly check this disturbing reminder of political violence. Lambert's next gesture of yet more appalling superciliousness consolidates his position as he tosses tips of fifty-pound notes, dangles notes in front of Sonia's cleavage and even puts a banknote into the Waiter's pocket. Money guarantees silent obsequiousness and first-rate treatment upon their return; it is a powerful weapon that keeps those who serve in their place.

Pinter's draft version of the Waiter's unpalatable interjection made the allusion to political violence far more pronounced. Characteristically, the process of revision resulted in excising several explicit political references that, though expunged from the published text, more specifically point to the Waiter's role in *Celebration* as well as to the dramatist's sources of inspiration. The draft version of the monologue mentions Sacco and Vanzetti, Paul Robeson, Tim Joad, Oscar Romero, Ernesto Cardenal, Augusto Sandino, Pablo Neruda, Che Guevara, Salvador Allende, Nazim Hikmer and Jorge Ellacuria (Pinter, "Celebration"). Similarly to the Waiter's preceding recitals, the list of names is truly diverse, embracing revolutionaries, social activists, politicians, theologians, artists and fictional figures. Nevertheless, the emphasis on those who struggled with political oppression and on their physical anguish is evident. So is Pinter's affinity with dissenting voices that, undaunted by "pitiless and savage odds" (*Celebration* 66), persevere in their protest against the coercive structures of established power.

It is uncertain why Pinter ultimately chose to erase these easily identifiable details – including contentions issues, such as Latin America, that he addressed with indefatigable dedication in his speeches, essays and articles.[5] One conceivable explanation might be the dramatist's deeply ingrained distrust of "definite statements" and "explicit moral tags" (Pinter, "Writing" 10, 12) as well as his determined opposition to subjecting the characters to "false articulation" and forcing them to speak of what they could never speak (14). Pinter seemed to believe that renouncing equivocality in favour of clear-cut specificity would insult the intellectual capacity of his audiences, placing his playwrighting on a par with all those reductive and moralising agit-prop dramas that he resented in the 1960s. The addressee of this disquieting comedy must be trusted to relate the Waiter's allusions to the generally obtainable, if shamefully neglected, facts of torture occurring worldwide.

Clearly, a number of vital questions as to how to deal with political theatre arise here. One may query, for instance, whether the perplexing ambiguity marking Pinter's drama – including the post-1980 "political" works which generally lack geographical, temporal and political precision or, alternatively, only subtly allude to familiar English contexts (Batty 113) – does not attenuate the intended political purport of Pinter's theatre. According to Nightingale, by insisting on generality in his "political" writings, Pinter runs the risk of dissipating point and impact: "A play can easily end up by being about everywhere, and therefore nowhere at which we are able to direct our feelings of outrage" (151). The absence of explicitly identifiable commitment was also

[5] For a representative sample of Pinter's articles, essays, speeches, letters and interviews expounding his political views, see, among others, the section "Politics" in his *Various Voices* 181–248.

attacked by Pinter's fellow-playwrights, John McGrath, Edward Bond and John Arden, who censured *Party Time* precisely for its being "unconcretised," "taken out of context," and thus precluding a politically viable reading (Billington, *Life* 333–34). But if Pinter's audiences fail to associate the Waiter's contributions with particular acts of political violence and concrete regimes that authorise them, have they really missed the central political import of *Celebration*? Also, while the specific nature of Lambert and Matt's dealings in the world could undoubtedly elude and perplex many recipients of Pinter's texts, the dramatist apparently has confidence in his audience. If he advisedly taps into obscurity, the chief reason for preserving the enigma would seem to be to urge one to question, and in questioning, to begin to pursue answers.

One is tempted to read the final silence of the Waiter in this dark, end-of-the-century, turn-of-the-millennium comedy as the ultimate, if paradoxical, statement of Pinter's political drama. Even though the existence of the individual voice in opposition is theoretically acknowledged by the playwright, the transgressing oppositional individuals in the political plots of his conception are invariably marginalised and muted. Pinter's political plays and sketches, such as *The Hothouse*, *Precisely*, *One for the Road*, *Mountain Language*, *The New World Order* and *Party Time*, conclude in silence and in the impending extinction of potential counterforces to the institutionalised authority. In *Party Time*, to highlight the theme of silence, Pinter even lets his persecuted dissident character, Jimmy, comment briefly, and poignantly, on what it is like to be deprived of speech (313–14). Although silence could be seen as a way of distancing oneself from the world or a manifestation of defiance, it is ultimately a form of withdrawal from struggle, including social struggles. The Waiter's final reticence, even if voluntary and intended, is clearly imbued with a sense of failure.

According to Grimes, who sees the brute victory of power over dissidence as the unavoidable image of his political dramas, Pinter's political theatre could be "summarised as a warning to respect human rights, paired with a lament that such a warning may never be heeded" (220). Indeed, Pinter never concealed his scepticism of a writer's capacity to change political morality. And yet, apparently separating the act of questioning from the possibility of supplying glib solutions to political injustice, he also fiercely clung to his belief that dissent and subversion, even if futile, must be attempted and did not cease to confront his audiences with horrors they would prefer to forget about. As Pinter himself commented on his political playwriting, insisting on the necessity of intellectual determination and subversive critique despite the enormous odds that exist: "I do believe that what old Sam Beckett says at the end of *The Unnamable* is right on the ball. 'You must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on'" ("Play" 20). Given the inevitability of the immoral use of power, Pinter restlessly compelled his audiences at least to recognise their complicity in ongoing social and political inequities.

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Quantum Mechanics and the Relativity of Human Identity: Tom Stoppard's *Hapgood*

Abstract: Tom Stoppard's *Hapgood* has often been discussed as a spy drama employing intertextual references to physics (quantum mechanics, uncertainty principle) and mathematics (Euler's geometry) to detect a traitor in the English secret-service network. On several occasions, however, Stoppard has argued that the play is specifically about a woman, Hapgood, whose identity is not easy to define. On the one hand, she is the leader of a group of agents. On the other, she is the mother of little Joe, whose father is Joseph Kerner, a member of the network and an atomic physicist whose explanations of physics and mathematics illuminate the meaning of the events of the play. Apart from the two elements inherent in the identity of Hapgood, that is, the "technical" and the "personal," she also appears in the double role of herself and her twin sister, Celia, this being an attempt, and a successful one, to confirm the suspicions that the traitor in their midst is Ridley, who not only is a double agent working both for the English and the Russians but also has a real twin brother.

In 1980, when asked by Joost Kuurman whether the starting point of his plays was an idea or a lot of research, Tom Stoppard answered:

> It's an idea. I don't really, on the whole, write plays which require research, I mean, some of them look as though they require research, but they're written out of my own interests. Certainly I had to do some research, if you like, for *Travesties*, because there was a separate decision to write about certain people in a certain place, so I read, I had to read a lot; but apart from that it's not really a matter of researching a subject and then feeling that one has something to write about. It's the other way round really. It starts off with an idea and I find out things if I need to. (Interview 44–45)

Taking into account Stoppard's output, one has to admit that the research done by him out of interest is especially impressive as it includes history, philosophy, art (especially painting), literature and science. Tom Stoppard's *Hapgood* (1988) is a spy drama which not only parodies "the double agent plot of Le Carré" **(**Rusinko 110**)** but also, according to Demastes, "is a spy thriller that operates at several science-informed levels" (42). The plot of the play concerns discovering which of the members of the British Secret Service is a double agent acting simultaneously for the British and the Russians. The investigation is carried out

systematically and carefully, and is metaphorically illustrated by discoveries of modern physics: Albert Einstein's theory of relativity, Richard. P. Feynman's *The Character of Physical Law* postulating that the nature of electrons which may be perceived as either particles or waves escapes a clear definition, and Karl Heisenberg's uncertainty principle.

Making numerous references to the discoveries of modern physics, *Hapgood* demonstrates the changes that have occurred in our conception of reality as a result of the shift from Newtonian mechanics to the formulation of relativity and quantum theory. Classical Newtonian physics postulated a permanent external world, fixed, objective and describable. Scientific laws were always based on strict cause-and-effect principles and were independent of the perceiver. Modern physics has shown that once it is discovered that a law does not hold in conditions in which it has so far been considered to hold, it is necessary to search for new explanations. This notion was expressed by Richard Feynman in his *Lectures on Physics*, from which Stoppard takes the motto for his play and to which he often refers in the course of the play.

As is so often in the case of Stoppard's plays, *Hapgood* is also a combination of different elements and ideas which interplay with one another to form a complex and elaborate structure. Commenting on the process of writing *Jumpers*, Stoppard made a few remarks which are fully justified in the context of his literary output: "At the same time there is more than one point of origin for a play, and the only useful metaphor I can think of for the way I think I write my plays is convergences of different threads. Perhaps carpet-making would suggest something similar" (qtd. in Hayman 4–5).

In the very same year, 1988, that is, eight years after having written *Hapgood*, Stoppard indicated several ideas which gave impetus to the play. He told Shusha Guppy:

> For *Hapgood*, the thing I wanted to write about seemed to suit the form of an espionage thriller. . . . It had to do with mathematics. I am not a mathematician but I was aware that for centuries mathematics was considered the queen of the sciences because it claimed certainty. It was grounded on some fundamental certainties – axioms – which led to others. But then, in a sense, it all started going wrong, with concepts like non-Euclidean geometry – I mean, looking at it from Euclid's point of view. The mathematics and physics turned out to be grounded on *un*certainties, on probability and chance. . . . I started reading mathematics without finding what I was looking for. In the end I realized that what I was after was something which any first-year physics student is familiar with, namely quantum mechanics. . . . I didn't research quantum mechanics but I was fascinated by the mystery which lies in the foundation of the observable world, of which the most familiar example is the particle-wave duality of light. I thought it was a good metaphor for human personality. The language of espionage lends itself to this duality – think of the double agent. (qtd. in Guppy 179–80)

In an interview with Peter Lewis, Stoppard claimed he was eager to "write about ultimate uncertainty. Quantum mechanics is about probability and the lack of absolutes. In investigating matter, the deeper they go, the smaller the particles, the less certainty they find. That seemed to me to be an exploitable idea" ("Quantum Stoppard" 58). He told Michael Billington soon after the play's opening night: "The play is specifically about a woman – Hapgood. . . . The central idea is that inside Hapgood one there is a Hapgood two sharing the same body; that goes for most of us" (qtd. in Billington 28). "The espionage thing," he insisted in a television interview with Kate Kellaway, "came second. It was just a consequence of looking for some sort of narrative which would try to exemplify the first thought" (qtd. in Delaney 130).[1] Stoppard's last declaration gave the subtitle to a subchapter discussing the play in William Demastes' study of contemporary theatre, "Stoppard's *Hapgood*: Double Agency and Quantum Personalities" (41–49), as it aptly combines the dualities existing in the play: the particle-wave duality in quantum mechanics, double agents, three couples of twins working in the network, "technical" and "personal" sides of most characters. Fleming also notices the duality of the structure of the play as nearly all of the scenes have their doubles (181).

The basic propositions taken from quantum mechanics are explained to Paul Blair, Hapgood's superior, by Joseph Kerner, an atomic physicist; a double agent, working as a sleeper for the Russians and as a joe for the British; the father of Hapgood's son, Joe. The mystery inherent in quantum mechanics makes Kerner doubt the possibility of describing objective reality. Twice in the course of the play, during dialogues with Blair, who insists that he likes "to know what's what," Kerner remarks ironically: "[O]bjective reality." When, on the first occasion, Blair observes: "I thought you chaps believed in that," a conversation follows:

> KERNER. 'You chaps'? Oh, *scientists*. (*Laughs*) 'You chaps!' Paul, objective reality is for zoologists. 'Ah, yes, definitely a giraffe.' But a double agent is not like a giraffe. A double agent is more like a trick of the light. Look. Look at the edge of the shadow. It is straight like the edge of the wall that makes it. Your Isaac Newton saw this and he concluded that light was made of little particles. Other people said light is a wave but Isaac Newton said, no, if light was a wave the shadow would bend round the wall like water bends round a stone in the river. . . . Every time we don't look we get a wave pattern. Every time we look to see how we get wave pattern, we get particle pattern. The act of observing determines the reality.
> BLAIR. How?
> KERNER. Nobody knows. Einstein didn't know. I don't know. There is no explanation in classical physics. Somehow light is particle and wave. (10–12)

[1] See also Stoppard, "Quantum Stoppard" (58).

On the second occasion, the following conversation takes place:

> KERNER. So now I am a prime suspect – I love that phrase, it's in nearly all the books. A prime is a number which cannot be divided except by itself, and all the suspects are prime; threes, fives, sevens, elevens . . . But really suspects are like squares, the product of twin roots, fours, nines, sixteens . . . what is the square root of sixteen?
> BLAIR. Is this a trick question?
> KERNER. For you probably.
> BLAIR. Four, then.
> KERNER. Correct. But also minus four. Two correct answers. Positive and negative. I am very fond of that minus, it is why I am what I am, I mean not as a suspect but as a physicist. Literally. I am an alchemist of energy and mass, I can turn one into the other and back again, because energy is mass multiplied by the speed of light squared. But the famous equation was not precisely found in its famous form, it was really the *square* of that, and E equals MC squared is a square root. But of course so is E equals *minus* MC squared, an equally correct solution . . . just like with your sixteen. Nobody took notice of the minus for years, it didn't seem to mean anything, there was nothing to which it belonged, you needed a minus world, an anti-world, with all the charges reversed, positive for negative, negative for positive. But finally someone trusted the mathematics and said – Well, maybe there is anti-matter; anti-atoms made of anti-particles. And lo!, they started to find them. And so on, et cetera, until, here I am, Joseph Kerner, the anti-matter man at the zoo. . . . We're all doubles. Even you. . . . The one who puts on the clothes in the morning is the working minority, but at night – perhaps in the moment before unconsciousness – we meet our sleeper – the priest is visited by the doubter, the Marxist sees the civilising force of the bourgeoisie, the captain of industry admits the justice of common ownership. (71–72)

As a matter of fact, Kerner (Stoppard?) makes three mathematical mistakes in the above speech. Firstly, a prime may be divided both by itself and by one. Secondly, E does not have to be a square. Take, for instance, M = 2 and C = 3. Calculated on the basis of Einstein's equation, E is then 2 multiplied by 9 and equals 18, which is not a square. Thirdly, it does not follow from his discussion of Einstein's equation that anti-matter exists. What he "proves" at best is that E, being a square number (a mistake in itself), has both a positive and a negative root and thus anti-energy exists. The mathematical correctness does not seem to be important in this case, however. What is important is the point being made about human nature. At the root of a single individual, we may find two (sometimes even more) opposites: priest and doubter, patriot and traitor, socialist and capitalist, "sleeper" and "joe." The notion of duality inherent in human nature helps Stoppard present and solve the mystery concerning espionage. Not only are some of the spies double-agents but, having twins, they are literally doubled. The analogy between particle physics and square numbers extends beyond espionage to include a much more general notion of the mystery of human identity itself and the nature of reality as such.

Elizabeth Hapgood, the only woman in the man-dominated world of espionage presented in the play, is the drama's main character as the title indicates. She appears in nearly all the scenes, the only two exceptions being scene two in act one and scene three in act two which are set at the zoo and present Kerner explaining Feynman's experiment and the nature of a square number to Blair. When the audience first see her in the opening scene at the pool, Hapgood is taking part in an exchange of briefcases, an act which aims to find the traitor among them. She is then efficient, fully in command of the situation until, later on, it appears that they have blown it. When she makes her second appearance in scene three, she is busy watching her son playing rugby and discussing problems concerning the network with her superior, Blair. Hapgood's reactions to her son's achievements as well as the remarks she makes about him indicate that she is (or, at least, would like to be) a loving mother. The first two glimpses of the woman we get in the play, then, present her "technical" and "personal" sides.

In several places in the play, references are made to the difference between the "technical" and "personal" aspect both of the situation and the characters involved (17, 24, 52). Thus, then, two aspects of Hapgood's character are presented. In the world of espionage, she is the network co-ordinator: an intelligent and efficient person, not only knowing the tricks of the trade but also capable of winning a chess game without having a chess board in front of her. It is here that she has her "joes" and is called by them "Mother." Blair comments on the origin of her code name: "[S]he was called Mother when she joined the Defence Liaison Committee – the tea would arrive and the Minister would say, 'Who's going to be mother?'" (27). When the tea-tray is brought in during one of the meetings in the course of the play, she asks "*brightly*" whether she should be mother (39). To some extent, at least, even in the present times, she is a mother figure for her joes, making sure they are treated properly and not harmed by unjustified accusations and suspicion. On the whole, "technically" speaking, she is a strong, most independent woman who organises and supervises the activities of her network and the men working in it.

On the "personal" level, she seems very vulnerable, unhappy and torn by conflicting emotions of whether to follow the line of duty towards the network or towards the closest ones, her two "Joes," Joseph Kerner and their son, Joe Hapgood. In the past, when she had a love affair with Joe Kerner and got pregnant, she decided to keep it secret because, as Ridley, another British agent and Hapgood's close associate, phrases it, "it was a choice between losing a daddy and losing a prize double, a turned mole who would have been blown overnight if he was known to be the father, and we aren't in the daddy business, we're in the mole business" (81). At present, she senses that little Joe's staying at a boarding school and having to pretend he was adopted is very stressful for

him, on which she comments to Blair at the rugby pitch while both of them are watching Joe play (18–19). Hapgood's vulnerability is visible in this scene and in the fact that she invites Blair to have tea with her: "Do you want some tea? They lay it on for parents and he's entitled to two" (24). She seems to be dependent on Blair, her section chief, whom she looks upon as a surrogate father-figure for herself and her son. She needs his friendship and responds to his affection, and that is why she is so disappointed and infuriated when it appears at the end of the play that, making little Joe come to the swap scene, Blair jeopardised his safety (86).

Hapgood's private self is also stressed during the scene with Kerner when she tells him that his career will be over after his cover as her "joe" has been blown. Then suddenly she switches from "technical" to "personal": "I won't need you any more, I mean I'll need you again – oh, *sugar*! – you *know* what I mean – do you want to marry me? I think I'd like to be married?" Kerner, however, tells her he has decided to go back to Russia and she concludes: "I don't think I'm going to marry you after all" (50). Her feelings for him seem uneasy to define. It could be said that Hapgood does not really know whether or not she wants to marry Kerner. It could also be said that because her proposal has not been accepted, she takes it back and pretends she does not care. She switches back to the "technical" level at the end of their conversation and reminds him about their professional meeting in the evening during which they will set a trap for Ridley. Her shifting from one aspect of her personality to the other is an instance of transgression, as defined by Michel Foucault: "[T]ransgression constantly crosses and recrosses a line which closes behind it in a wave of extremely short duration" (34).

The trap set for Ridley consists of two elements. Firstly, Ridley is told that little Joe has been kidnapped and will be exchanged for the materials delivered to the Russians by him. Only at the end of the scene, when Ridley has already left the room and we watch Hapgood talking on the phone with her son, who is safe at school, do we discover that the characters were pretending, playing out a scene of their own making in order to deceive Ridley. The ambush, then, has been set for Ridley but not for the audience. During the swap scene it appears that Blair has acted on his own. He has set his own ambush and, without warning or consulting anyone, has had the boy brought to the pool.

Secondly, in order to achieve her aim, Hapgood decides to do so with the aid of her own twin, Celia Newton. In this case, the ambush is set both for Ridley and for the audience. When the scene in a photographer's studio opens, we see Hapgood, who "is as different from her other self as the flat is different from her office" (65). Ridley, talking on the radio with Hapgood, comments on this, saying: "She may be your twin sister but there the resemblance ends" (66). The disorderly, absent minded, pot-smoking, bohemian Celia is the opposite of the matter-of-fact,

well-organised Hapgood. The gap separating them is also underscored by the differentiation of the language they use. Hapgood never swears, this being pointed out by Blair both indirectly, in teasing her with "f-f-fiddle" (19), the only swear word she uses, and directly, when he asks her: "[D]o you never use bad language, never ever?" (23). Celia, on the other hand, uses language full of slang expressions and obscenities, the very first word uttered by her being scatological. It appears that Ridley wants Celia to play the part of Hapgood, which will be a difficult task as the two women are diametrically different.

As we next see them, they are in Hapgood's office. When Maggs, Hapgood's secretary, enters, Ridley has to be very inventive not to let the disguise of the woman be revealed. He does not fully succeed, though, as Celia tells Maggs to "piss off" and "[*t*]*he world ends for* MAGGS, *just for a moment*" (76). They are now waiting for the phone call which is to settle the details of the swap and Celia makes Ridley start playing a card game. The situation is complicated as they do not have a deck and Ridley does not know which game they are playing. The basis of "snap," the game they are playing, is twinning cards. The players reveal successive cards simultaneously and if they match, the first one to say "snap" wins the pair. The player who gets the bigger number of pairs wins. The choice of the game metaphorically underscores the doubling of the players and spies, there being two Ridleys as well as twin sisters. Celia wins this deckless card game just as Hapgood wins her boardless chess games. When the telephone rings, Ridley nearly breaks her hand, so that when she starts speaking, "*she is whimpering and disoriented*" (79). Not only does he want Celia to pretend she is Hapgood but he also wants her to sound as if she were in pain over the loss of her son. This scene demonstrates the notion so important in the play that "the act of observing determines the reality" (12). The obvious explanation of her sounding as if she were in pain is that she actually *is* in pain. Her interlocutor on the phone may be justified in thinking that her sobbing is an expression of her grief and sorrow concerning Joe. The audience, however, know that her cry of pain has quite a different explanation. The interpretation given by an individual perceiver is thus determined by their perception of reality and the information about it provided to them. As the scene ends and Ridley has left, the audience discover they have been ambushed: Hapgood tells Maggs what the next chess move is to be. It is only then that the audience learn there is no Celia: Hapgood is playing the role of her twin sister in order to trap Ridley.

In scene five, set in a hotel room, we see Hapgood (playing the role of Celia again) sleeping. In the preceding scene, Kerner, while discussing everyone's doubles, mentioned meeting our "sleepers," our hidden selves (72). At the same time, he complained about never having seen Elizabeth sleeping (74). Now we watch her sleeping, the scene evoking numerous possible interpretations. Firstly, the sleeping woman is Celia, the opposite of Hapgood, who never sleeps.

Secondly, she is Hapgood's "sleeper," her double, her "personal" self. And thirdly, she is, as she puts it, Ridley's "dreamgirl," "Hapgood without the brains or the taste," this being her answer to his question: "*Who the hell are you*?" (83). In the next scene, set at the pool, Ridley meets his double and "*the two men embrace briefly*" (83). The ensuing exchange of briefcases points to Ridley as the traitor, a double agent who is also physically doubled, working with his twin brother. It is unclear whether he realises that Hapgood does not have a twin sister. If we consider the final sentence uttered by him before being shot, "Well, now I don't know which one you are. One of them can shoot and one of them can. . ." (85), we can assume that he believes there are two of them. Yet, if this interpretation is accepted, it is difficult to account for his earlier speech:

> Listen, be yourself. These people are not for you, in the end they get it all wrong, the dustbins are gaping for them. Him most. He's had enough out of you and you're getting nothing back, he's dry and you're the juice. We can walk out of here, Auntie. (83)

The use of the word "Auntie" indicates that he is speaking to Celia and not to Hapgood. Yet, if this is the case, what he is saying does not make sense, the words being addressed to Hapgood and not Celia. Besides, in the earlier scene, he promised he would kill Hapgood (and not Celia) if she set him up (82). It seems, therefore, that he does know Celia has never existed as an individual but has been only the other self of Hapgood, her sleeper, her private self. If this option is taken, the words "be yourself" are an urge directed to Hapgood, asking her to stop treating her "technical" side as more important and to concentrate on her more real, "personal" self. Hapgood does not or cannot respond and, as Ridley reaches for his gun, he is shot by her. While Ridley's body is carried away, Wates spits at her a particularly well chosen epithet, "Oh, you *mother*" (86). Gradually, a transgression begins to take place within Hapgood: "[*h*]*er anger starts dispersing into misery*" (86). She becomes aware of the implications of the situation and of the fact that she has killed a man who, even though suspecting a possible risk, decided to help her son. When taking this decision, Ridley considered the "personal" more important than the "technical." While shooting him, Hapgood acted as Mother and not as the mother of a child who has been saved by Ridley. The killing of Ridley puts her under a great stress. Firstly, as an ultimate act of killing someone and, secondly, as the killing of a person who loves her and is willing to sacrifice his safety in order to protect her and her child. There is yet one more aspect of the situation which should be underlined here. Ridley, who transgresses the "technical" by putting the "personal" before it, is dead. Blair, for whom the "technical" dominates over the "personal" and who has put little Joe at risk, thinks that Hapgood will get over it. Hapgood, however, has decided to withdraw. When he argues that "[o]ne has to pick oneself up and carry on. It's them or us, isn't it?" she finishes her answer

insisting on the need to withdraw by saying "oh, f-f-fuck it, Paul!" (87). The phrase she uses is evidently one of Celia's, not one of Hapgood's. It is yet Hapgood who uses it. It can be argued that her using this phrase is an indication that her "sleeper" has at last awakened. Due to the new understanding of the rules governing espionage achieved thanks to the recent events, she has decided to withdraw and to concentrate on the "personal," which is, as she has found out, more important than the "technical."

The last glimpse the audience get of her in the play is her "personal" self: she is at the rugby pitch, watching her small Joe playing the game. Her other Joe, Joseph Kerner, is standing next to her, having come to say good-bye to her before his departure for Russia. Kerner is introduced to Joe, yet the boy is not told that he is his father. Hapgood suggests to Kerner that they could go to have tea together: "They lay it on for parents" (88). This part of the conversation is reminiscent of an earlier conversation at the pitch between Hapgood and Blair, yet now she does not repeat the end of the sentence ("and he's entitled to two," 24). When Kerner refuses to join her, "[*s*]*he breaks down*" and he tries to comfort her. As he is about to leave, she cries out: "How can you go? *How can you*?" Then she starts watching the game which has just begun. A few moments later, "[*s*]*he turns round and finds that* KERNER *is still there*. *She turns back to game and comes alive*" (89).

The ending of the play is ambiguous. According to Roger Rees, who played the part, "maybe Kerner does not stay at the rugby pitch or maybe he stays for the rest of his life or maybe he stays for two days" (qtd. in Delaney 147). The ending does not provide an answer as to whether Kerner will leave or stay, yet it states explicitly what is most important in life. Simon Jones, who played Blair in the Los Angeles production, has remarked that the events of the play make it obvious that what is most real and important in life are "straightforward ordinary human relationships" (qtd. in Delaney 157). As the curtain falls, the audience know that Hapgood has given up the "technical" for the sake of the "personal." Little Joe, who earlier did not even have a mother, Hapgood's "personal" self being suppressed by her "technical" self, now gets his mother back. Maybe he will also have a father in the end, the closing of the play indicating that Kerner might stay after all. In his earlier play, Stoppard argued that every good boy deserves a father and there is no reason to suspect that Joe might be an exception to this rule.

The Faber and Faber edition of *Hapgood*, presenting three numbered booths at the pool and two briefcases placed outside them, refers to the "technical" side of the play and is evocative of the beginning of the drama as far as the world of espionage is concerned. The cover of the programme of the Aldwych Theatre was "dominated by the photograph of young Hapgood, its edges tattered where his father has torn it from a team picture, and meeting directly over the heart of

the boy are a pair of rifle sights" (Delaney 140), and referred to and stressed the "personal" aspect of Stoppard's drama.

The complexity inherent in human nature is not restricted to Hapgood only, even though in her case it is most evident. This notion is evoked by a specific use of names. Hapgood is given a great number of them. Agents Ridley and Merryweather call her "Mother"; her secretary, Maggs, calls her "Mrs Hapgood"; Wates uses the form "ma'am"; Blair calls her "Mother" and "Elizabeth"; little Joe uses the phrases "Mummy" and "Mum"; and Celia speaks of "Betty." Finally, Kerner employs the Russian form of her name, "Yelizaveta," its diminutives, "Lilya" and "Lilitchka," and "mamushka." The etymological meaning of the protagonist's two other names is discussed by Hersh Zeifman, who notices that the name, Hapgood, consists of two elements and "Hap (defined by the *Old English Dictionary* as 'chance or fortune, luck, lot') is specifically linked to good" (196). He furthermore stresses the fact that when Hapgood chooses to play her twin sister, "she slyly names herself Celia (Latin caelium: heaven) Newton" (194). The variety of names used for Hapgood seems to point out that, even though she is the same individual, she yet presents divergent images to different people.

The names of other characters are also telling and add to the overall impact of the play. Ridley (a telling name in itself as the characters and the audience alike have to solve the riddle of his identity) appears to have Ernest as his first name, which becomes meaningful if we realise that while he is a traitor in the "technical" sense, he is most earnest in the "personal" sense.[2] Zeifman points out that "Kerner is thus as much a riddle as Ridley is . . . , the enigma of Kerner's identity, like Ridley's, is embodied in his very name (German Kern: the nucleus of atom)" (191). It can be said, then, that the use of specific telling names is one of the ways of introducing the principal thematic interest of the play, that is, the difficulty of establishing the nature of human identity and, by extension, the nature of reality as such.

The paper began with Stoppard's opinion comparing writing plays to "carpet-making" and his four opinions concerning the different "threads" which converge in *Hapgood*, indicating that the form of a spy thriller, combined with the achievements of quantum mechanics, seemed most suitable to present the duality of human nature. In a conversation with Hapgood, Kerner praises this genre:

> I like them. Well, they're different, you know. Not from each other naturally. I read in hope but they all surprise in the same way. Ridley is not very nice: he'll turn out to be all right. Blair will be the traitor: the one you liked. This is how the author says, "You see! Life is not

[2] Affinities between *Hapgood* and *The Importance of Being Earnest* are discussed by Cohn (144) and Zinman (316).

> like books, alas!". . . . When I have learned the language I will write my own book. The traitor will be the one you don't like very much, it will be a scandal. And I will reveal him at the beginning. I don't understand this mania for surprises. If the author knows, it's rude not to tell. (47)

It could be argued that the description of what Kerner's novel will be like is the description of *Hapgood*. The author, Stoppard himself, does not reveal Ridley as the traitor at the beginning, yet he constructs the play in a way similar to the rules governing an experiment. From the beginning of the play, the audience are aware that the traitor is to be found while the play presents the act of setting up an experiment whose aim is to discover whether Ridley is the guilty one or not. Unlike a physics experiment, however, the drama not only says how the world of things works but also what the world of things means. The relativity and uncertainty concerning both the world of physics and the world of human beings are unquestionable, yet the overall impact of the play and its final scene indicate that one should not sacrifice the "personal" for the "technical," that one should remain faithful to oneself and the loved ones. Paradoxically enough, among the numerous dichotomies discernible in the play (light as both particle and wave, double agents, twins, art and science, illusion and reality) yet another one can be noticed: overall relativity is put side by side with idealism visible in the stress placed on the not relative value of simple and basic human relationships.

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The Mathematics in a Dramatic Text – *A Disappearing Number* by Complicite

Abstract: *A Disappearing Number* gives vent to Simon McBurney's fascination with science, in this case with mathematics. The story of the mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan constituted the groundwork for the collective theatrical production whose literary "translation" was published by Oberon Books in 2007. This article investigates the ways in which the text de-automatises dramatic conventions. On the one hand, the text, as a literary record of the theatrical production, seems to be an intersemiotic translation of the "original," which suggests its secondary, derivative character, but, on the other hand, because of its status as a dramatic text, *A Disappearing Number* enters the sphere of literature which is intrinsically subordinated to the powers of imagination. In this way, it is argued, Complicite associates mathematics with art (literature): these are the spheres where imagination is of the greatest importance. This is made explicitly apparent in the characters' utterances and in various textual strategies. *A Disappearing Number* begins, for example, with an explanation of a mathematical concept provided by Ruth, a lecturer, in a "university lecture hall." The explanation is followed by a strictly meta-theatrical greeting of the audience. The illusion of the stage is emphasised as much as the immutable nature of mathematical reality at this point. The function of mathematics is not restricted to the thematic dimension of the play; mathematical principles are also decisive for the construction of the model of the world. Simultaneity of action, for instance, reflects the complicated nature of certain equations, the Great War is associated with the number of its victims, Ramanujan's death is shown on stage through a metaphorical subtraction and the passing of the number zero, and even the title suggests some equivalence between a number and a life of a human being.

1

An expression of some aesthetic presumptions of the Théâtre de Complicité may be found on the title page of their book entitled simply *Complicite: Plays 1*:

> Founded in 1983, Complicite is a constantly evolving ensemble of performers and collaborators, now led by Artistic Director Simon McBurney. Complicite's work has ranged from entirely devised work to theatrical adaptations and revivals of classic texts. . . . Always changing and moving forward to incorporate new stimuli, the principles of the work have remained close to the original impulses: seeking what is most alive, integrating text, music, image and action to create surprising, disruptive theatre.

It is true that since 1991 Complicite have produced such diverse performances as *The Street of Crocodiles* (a multi-lingual performance based on Bruno Schultz's short stories, letters and essays), *The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol* (Brechtian in character, based on a story by John Berger), *Mnemonic* (in this case the semiosphere of the stage mixes together an archeological investigation of a Neolithic body found in the Italian Alps, the theory of fractals, the conventions of a radio-play, and striking allusions to literary works – the name of the protagonist is Virgil). Then, in 2003, Complicite's enduring fascination with crossing the boundaries of individual codes, languages included, resulted in the co-operation with Tokyo's Setagaya public theatre and in the production of *The Elephant Vanishes*, a multi-media performance in Japanese based on short stories by Haruki Murakami. Spectacular as it was, the visual dimension of *The Elephant Vanishes* may be best illustrated by the powerful theatrical creation of an on-stage elephant: it was brought to life by a visual synecdoche of an elephant's eye shown on a portable TV screen which was tenderly caressed by one of the actors.[1]

Notwithstanding the highly selective character of the above examples, I have decided to use them in order to reveal the most subversive tendency in the work of Complicite. By adapting the whole spectrum of various aesthetic principles (the minimalist *Shun Kin*, yet another performance in Japanese, as opposed to the exuberant *The Elephant Vanishes*), by shifting between languages, literatures and cultures (British, Jewish, European, Polish, Japanese and other), by transgressing – or should I say ignoring? – the boundaries of particular media,[2] Complicite persistently de-automatise their own achievements and go against the conventions that were previously functional in their artistic creations. It is disturbing that all those "post-dramatic" performances, based on short-stories, essays and other narratives, were followed by a production of Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*, one of those twentieth-century classics that thrive on the literary provenance of a theatrical performance.[3]

2

A Disappearing Number was first produced in 2007. It followed the 2005 revival of *Measure for Measure* and preceded the premiere production of *Shun-kin*. The performance was subsequently revived in 2008 and 2010. It is

[1] For more data on theatrical productions of Complicite and photographic documentation of the performances discussed here, see the company's website: www.complicte.org.

[2] Functionality of media in theatre is discussed, for example, in Limon and Żukowska.

[3] It is worth stressing that despite an earlier tendency to adapt texts for the contemporary stage (see *Measure for Measure*), Complicite obeyed the majority of restrictions imposed by the dramatic text in the production of *Endgame*.

noteworthy that, following the pattern established by *Light*, *The Street of Crocodiles*, *The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol* and *Mnemonic*, *A Disappearing Number* was published as a dramatic text and we can speak here of an intersemiotic translation from "stage" to "page." Deprived of its visual and aural dimensions (hence of its spoken live character), the semiosphere of a theatrical performance found its literary counterpart in the dramatic structures of a text. Thus, *A Disappearing Number* became "a literary fact." This was accomplished in the way parallel to the one described by Jurij Tynianow: in short, non-literary – in this case theatrical – structures transgress literary norms so as to re-formulate the constructional principles of literature. In this way – to use Dobrochna Ratajczakowa's terms (36–42) – the work of Complicite goes beyond the interests of theatrology and enters the sphere of dramatology (which is good news for self-declared orthodox dramatologists like the present author).

One more theoretical issue demands clarification before I embark on a more detailed analysis of *A Disappearing Number*. There are profound consequences for my application of the term "intersemiotic translation" in reference to an intriguing transformation of a theatrical performance into a dramatic text. Used in the sense proposed by George Steiner, an act of translation is understood here as a hermeneutic process which consists of four sequential stages: 1. axiological trust, 2. an invasion, 3. a proper translation, and 4. restitution – "The just translator . . . will seek for equity in the hermeneutic exchange so as to compensate for the 'adulteration and *déperdition*' . . . caused by all *translatio*" (8). When translated into a dramatic text, *A Disappearing Number* not only acquires the permanence of the written, but also exploits the semantic and aesthetic potential of the literary mode of communication (we all know, of course, that conventionally the process goes the other way round: a theatrical concretisation of a dramatic text "enlivens" the written by putting literature into a theatrical context). What is crucial for me, however, is the notion of compensation, restitution: when deprived of the visual and the aural, *A Disappearing Number* explores the literary potential of the language and thrives on its poetic value.

3

The subversive force of *A Disappearing Number* is strengthened by yet one more aspect. After all, the origins of the performance are to be sought in a book. But this time, it is neither a dramatic text (as in *Measure for Measure* or *Endgame*) nor even a prose narrative (as in *The Street of Crocodiles*, *The Elephant Vanishes* or *Shun-kin*). The book whose plot stimulated the theatrical creation of *A Disappearing Number* was *A Mathematician's Apology*, published

in 1940 and written by a Cambridge mathematician, G. H. Hardy. It describes the short career of an Indian mathematical genius, Srinivasa Ramanujan. We may say that selected passages of the memoirs fulfilled functions which, in more conventional circumstances, are ascribed to the text of a play. This sophisticated and extensive semiotic process endowed *A Mathematician's Apology* with the codex function, and, in turn, imposed mathematics upon the supercode of a dramatic text. The remaining part of this paper presents my attempts at proving the relevance of the thesis formulated in the previous sentence. From now on, I will concentrate entirely on *A Disappearing Number* in its dramatic, i.e., literary, shape, and therefore all questions of a strictly theatrical character cease to be valid. In other words, I will understand terms such as "theatre," "stage" and "audience" as abstract concepts generated by the dramatic text and active within its semiosphere (Lotman 123). In this way, then, we have transgressed into the sphere of the literary imagination.

4

A Disappearing Number consists of fifteen compositional segments. Even though the word does not appear in the text, they function as scenes and I will refer to them as such. So, first, numbers govern the composition (segmentation), but this is true also for other aspects of the text. The majority of characters are either professional or amateur mathematicians. On the one hand, we have the world-famous Hardy and Ramanujan, a university lecturer represented by Ruth, and a scholar, Aninda (he is, in fact, a physicist who creatively employs Ramanujan's concepts). On the other hand, there is Al, who in his professional life of a features market manager involuntarily uses mathematics (as I shall illustrate later, Al falls in love with Ruth because of mathematics). More striking, though, and definitively more spectacular, is the example of an Indian cleaner who, after emptying a waste-paper bin and performing other cleaning duties, without any serious effort corrects the mistake in the functional equation of the Riemann zeta function which is written on the whiteboard of the university lecture hall.

The characters use numbers when speaking of time ("ANINDA. At about ten o'clock on the morning of March 17, 1914, the SS Nevasa slipped slowly away from the dock"; 54), travelling in space ("RAMANUJAN. Madras is at the latitude of 13 degrees north, a prime number. The ship travels south to the latitude of 7 degrees north, also a prime number"; 55), and communicating with others – the convention of the phone conversation may serve as an example. The following situation is placed immediately after Ruth's academic lecture in scene two when Al and Ruth get to know each other:

AL. Wait! There is one particular number that I am, in fact, interested in.
RUTH. Yes? *Pause.*
AL. It's your phone number. *Pause. Ruth smiles.*
RUTH. I've never been asked that before. After a lecture, I mean…
AL. You're blushing.
RUTH. You're blushing.
AL. See where the Riemann Zeta Function gets you. (28–29)

As we can see in this episode, it is the incomprehensibility of a particular mathematical equation which gets Al's attention. He becomes attracted to Ruth because of her scholarly power to understand issues that remain incomprehensible to him: a trivial beginning of a love affair is motivated by rather unconventional sophistication.

The motif of a phone number frequently becomes multifunctional in *A Disappearing Number*. The number the characters discussed in scene two reappears in scene four when Ruth leaves a message on Al's answer-machine:

RUTH. Al, it's Ruth, Ruth Minnen. You're probably in Geneva by now… I just wanted to say thank you for the other night. I had a really lovely time. I probably didn't manage to assuage your worries about infinity. But have a successful trip and do call any time, next time you're in London. Bye. Oh! My number: 0207 291 1729. Bye. (36)

By revealing her phone number to Al, Ruth reveals her intention to continue the affair and the number becomes a part of her emotional expression.

Not surprisingly, in the world of mathematicians, numbers, all sorts of numbers, are endowed with semantics. The telephone number mentioned by Ruth is no exception to this rule. One aspect of the on-stage action – one of its humorous sub-plots – presents strenuous, if funny, attempts by Al to transfer the number to his phone (there are some curious elements of the convention of the comedy of errors in his numerous phone conversations with a Barbara Jones from BT headquarters). The intimate associations of 0207 291 1729 are clear once we become aware of the fact that Ruth, who at one stage became Al's wife, died when searching for traces of Ramanujan in India. The four final figures of the phone number, 1729, play, moreover, a significant role in the development of their relationship. The audience's curiosity concerning the meaning of the number is only satisfied as late as in scene thirteen when one of the final meetings of Hardy and Ramanujan is presented:

HARDY. The number of my taxi-cab was 1729. It seemed to me rather a dull number.
RUTH writes 1729 on the OHP. RAMANUJAN looks at Hardy and then speaks live for the first time:
RAMANUJAN. No, Hardy, 1729 is a very interesting number. It is the smallest number expressible as the sum of two cubes in two different ways. *Pause.*
ANINDA. That was the exchange as Hardy recorded it and it must be substantially accurate. He was the most honest of men and, besides, who could possibly have invented it? (79)

The four final figures of the telephone number echo an episode from *A Mathematician's Apology*. But for Al and Ruth the number is also a bone of contention since it reveals the discrepancy in their mathematical knowledge: Ruth knows more than Al and she wants him to follow her way of reasoning. This is another useful quotation taken from scene thirteen:

> RUTH. (*Looks at* [*Al*].) What's the significance of my phone number?
> AL. What?
> RUTH. (*Angry*) You see, you don't understand because you haven't even read this fucking book yet! *She pushes the copy of* A Mathematician's Apology *towards him, furious.* (80)

Intertextual connections have been firmly established: the text of *A Disappearing Number* provokes the reader/audience to become familiar with Ramanujan's story as related by G. H. Hardy.

5

A Disappearing Number consolidates equivalence of mathematics and art. Both are shaped as spheres dominated by the powers of the creative imagination. Constantly reinforced on various textual levels, this equivalence formulates a field of associations in which superiority of mathematics is unquestionable. The performance begins with Ruth's explanation of certain mathematical concepts:

> *RUTH enters. She writes '1, 2, 3, 4, 5' on the whiteboard.*
> RUTH. (*Nervous*) Good evening ladies and gentleman. I'd like to go through one or two very basic mathematical ideas that are integral to this evening so that the recurrent mathematical themes become clear to you. (21)

Her academic monologue, which takes the shape of a lecture delivered in a "university lecture hall," is followed by a strictly meta-theatrical address that Aninda directs to the audience:

> *RUTH continues to lecture, oblivious, as ANINDA addresses the audience.*
> ANINDA. (*In an Indian accent.*) You're probably wondering at this point if this is the entire show. I'm Aninda, this is Al and this is Ruth. (*Pause. His accent changes.*) Actually, that's a lie. I'm an actor playing Aninda, he's an actor playing Al and she's an actress playing Ruth. But the mathematics is real. It's terrifying, but it's real. (23)

Here and in subsequent passages of Aninda's monologue, deictic indicators contribute to the formation of both the fictional world and the model of the theatre. The reader is forced to take the perspective of the audience who is aware of its theatrical status and simultaneously taken in by the theatrical illusion.

The equivalence of the mathematical and the meta-theatrical is further strengthened in the passage which employs a trivial, yet, in the theatrical context, challenging, mathematical trick:

> ANINDA. (*He looks out at the audience.*) They say mathematics is not a spectator sport, so please think of a number. Don't tell anyone, this is your own personal, secret, number. We will call this number 'n'. Unless you are like Daniel Tammet and can remember pi to twenty-two thousand decimal places, please choose a simple number. . . . Now multiply that number by two. . . . Now add fourteen. (*He points into the auditorium.*) Someone is already with their head in their hands – obviously choosing a negative number has repercussions. Now divide this new number in two. . . . Finally, take away your original number. (*Pause.*) And what I like about the theatre is that we are all able to imagine the same thing at the same time, just as now, we are all imagining the number seven. (25)

In the above passage, Aninda de-automatises the convention of a temporal discrepancy between the stage and the audience. By suggesting a spatio-temporal unity between the two, the fragment seems to challenge Limon's concept of time in theatre (5–8). Yet, it is, of course, the codex which – by individualising theatrical reception – imposes textual meanings upon the model of the theatre.

Both the illusion of the stage and the fictionality of the world it creates are emphasised as much as the immutable nature of mathematical reality. Towards the end of the play, in scene fourteen, the semantics of the juxtaposition is made even more specific. The appropriate passage is, not surprisingly, uttered by Ruth:

> (*Voice-over.*) For me, and I suppose for most mathematicians, there is another reality, which I shall call mathematical reality. (*Pause.*) Take a chair for example. A chair may be simply a collection of whirling electrons, or an idea in the mind of God; the more we think of it, the fuzzier its outlines become in a haze of sensation which surrounds it. (*Pause.*) But the number 2 or 317 has nothing to do with sensation. 317 is a prime number, not because we think so, or because our minds are shaped in one way rather than another, but because it is so, because mathematical reality is built that way…
> *The music climaxes and the chair explodes*. (82)

The visual and the spoken intertwine. Faced with the immutability of the primes, the on-stage dematerialisation of a chair, one of favourite props of Complicite, proves what is, and what is not, real on the stage.

6

In the concluding part of this article, I wish to enumerate some possible directions for further discussion.

6.1

Numbers actively participate in the creation of visual and aural metaphors in *A Disappearing Number*. On the one hand, they contribute to the implications of the semantic noise, which is particularly striking when numbers dominate the stage in the way they do in one of the final episodes in scene four:

> BARBARA. (*Voice over.*) Mr Cooper, can I take your telephone number again please?
> AL. It's 0207…
> BARBARA. (*Voice over.*) 0…2…0…7…
> ANINDA. (*Into phone.*) 00…41…for Switzerland, Auntie…
> *And they are all speaking simultaneously. A chaotic jumble of numbers.* (37)

Numbers contribute here to the impression of chaos. On the other hand, numbers broaden sequences of equivalence and thus enliven the functionality of fields of associations. This is the case in scenes ten and twelve where stage directions, when mixed with utterances, establish the paradigmatic equivalence between numbers, snow and winter; between zero, miscarriage and death; and between a mathematical equation and the victims of the First World War:

> RUTH. (*Voice-over.*) 2 cubed times 3 squared times 5 times 7 times 11 times 13 times 97 equals 34,954,920. . . . 34,954,920. The number of dead, wounded and missing in the First World War. (73–74)

In this powerful passage, what initially seems a mere number turns out, once again, to convey unexpected meaning (the same method of meaning creation is applied, as we remember, to the number of Ruth's telephone).

6.2

In *A Disappearing Number* mathematics is firmly associated with art. Their juxtaposition becomes a central theme in the passage of *A Mathematician's Apology*, which is read by Ruth in scene five:

> A mathematician, like a painter or a poet is a maker of patterns. . . . A painter makes patterns with shapes and colours, a poet with words. . . . A mathematician on the other hand has nothing to work with but ideas, and so his patterns are likely to last longer, since ideas wear less with time than words. . . .
> HARDY. (*Voice-over.*) The mathematician's patterns, like the painter's or the poet's must be beautiful; the ideas, like the colours or the words, must fit together in a harmonious way. Beauty is the first test: there is no permanent place in the world for ugly mathematics. (41)

In this context, it is very important that, similarly to poetry, the beauty of mathematics lies in what is beyond comprehension. We remember that this incomprehension was the main reason of Al's fascination with Ruth:

> RUTH. (*Voice-over*.) It may be hard to define mathematical beauty but that is true of beauty of any kind. We may not know quite what we mean by a beautiful poem, but that does not prevent us from recognising one when we read it. (42)

6.3

Abstract as they are, mathematical patterns contribute to the creation of a model of the world in *A Disappearing Number*. This process is metaphorically described in the following stage direction in scene ten: "*The mathematics from the small blackboard slowly grows until it fills the entire stage*" (62). Mathematical (geometrical) patterns govern the distribution of actors on the stage in certain episodes. They are employed so as to describe the pace of the characters' lives (death is expressed either as "zero" or as moving away towards infinity) and to convey spatio-temporal concepts (e.g., dates and latitudes). Finally, we should not forget that even the title suggests some equivalence between a number and a life of a human being: we are as numbers that disappear in an infinity.

6.4

In *A Disappearing Number*, it soon becomes clear that the abstract world of mathematics affects what is happening around people in a most tangible way. The characters are aware that mathematics may be used as a dangerous tool and for brutal purposes. In scene twelve, for example, Hardy suggests the dangers of mathematics in the following utterance:

> HARDY. We have still to ask whether mathematics does harm. . . . I believe that pure mathematics has no effects on war; the real mathematician has his conscience clear. . . . The trivial mathematics on the other hand has many implications in war. . . . The gunnery experts and aeroplane designers could not do their work without it. . . . Mathematics facilitates modern, scientific, total war. (72–73)

Hardy's idealistic distinction of "pure" and "trivial" mathematics puts forward all the moral anxiety of modern science: what can be done with the results of even most abstract investigations is never under control of the investigator.

6.5

The model of the world which emerges from *A Disappearing Number* promotes the impassable barrier between mathematical reality and the way in which it is described. There is a belief that "real" mathematics substantially differs from what is achieved in its description. In this way, Complicite join a well-established dramatic tradition of artistic explorations of the semiotic discrepancy between the phenomenal world and semiotic reality: there is no ontological link between a signifier and a signified. *A Disappearing Number* echoes, in this sense, the work of a whole group of twentieth-century classics: John Millington Synge, Samuel Beckett and, of course, Tom Stoppard.

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Sensory Transgression: Literary Representations of Women's Sight and Hearing in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

Abstract: The article focuses on literary representations of women's sight and hearing in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. It firstly addresses the meaning and significance of sensory perception in Western culture. The emphasis is put on the transgressive usage of the senses and the gendering of sensory perceptions which fulfil many cultural functions: determining our cognition, being the tools of power relations or conditioning our sensations. Sensual perception is examined as an unstable cultural construct undergoing changes in time. The textual analysis of *Hamlet* presents the way in which Ophelia and Gertrude perceive, revealing the manner in which cultural formations of the senses were constructed in Shakespeare's works. Linguistic images of transgressive female perception emerge from a comparison between representations of sensual experience of male and female characters in the play.

Introducing sensory studies into the field of cultural studies is a matter of transgression. It is one that has a ground-breaking impact on the apprehension of the senses. Transgression begins when cognitive boundaries are crossed and a disruption in the accepted and conventional approach to the senses arises. Not only does the study of perception belong to natural sciences, but it also arouses interest within broadly defined cultural studies. This concerns especially the "sensual revolution" (Howes, "Introduction" 1) which emerged at the beginning of the twenty-first century and which contributed to recovering perception from the laboratory (4). David Howes explains the heightened contemporary interest in the senses:

> The senses are now being investigated by historians, sociologists, anthropologists, geographers and literary scholars among many others. This revolution in the study of the senses is based on the premise that the sensorium is a social construct, which is in turn supported by the growing body of research showing that the senses are lived and understood differently in different cultures and historical periods. ("Charting" 114)

If "the senses are everywhere," literary scholars should examine representations of the senses in works of literature. An important purpose of literary studies would then be to bring to light sensory values encoded in written texts. They are produced and espoused by different groups in society, conveying

competing cultural paradigms and ideologies. Howes comments on the system of sensory values, explaining that it "is never entirely articulated through language, but it is practiced and experienced (and sometimes challenged), by human beings as culture bearers. The sensory order, in fact, is not just something one sees or hears about; it is something one *lives*" ("Introduction" 3). Yet a piece of literature consists exclusively of the written word, which is the only trace leading to the encryption of the sensory order of the culture that has generated it. Written texts provide representations of the sensuous dimension of a particular culture, hence they reflect the sensory model and values, (re)created by the lived experience of human beings in certain spatio-temporal conditions. A piece of literature does not allow for an immediate contact with sensory practices and experiences belonging to past times, for the purpose of a written text is to mediate between our contemporary sensual being in the world and a bygone perceptual presence. Through analyses of cultural materials the study of the senses becomes a sensorially-conditioned challenge. As Howes puts it precisely: "Sensorially speaking, the past *is* a foreign country, and it needs to be explored with senses wide open" ("Can These Dry Bones" 450). William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* belongs to this foreign country and is also open to scrutiny from the perspective of sensory studies. "The Mona Lisa of literature" has been analyzed with critical attention from various points of view, yet not from the perceptual angle; it has not yet been "sensed."

In his article "*Hamlet* and the Senses," Mark C. Caldwell makes a suggestion that little attention has been paid to "the imagery of sense" in this drama (157). He highlights "the importance of the five senses to the play," yet concentrates mainly on sight and hearing. In Caldwell's opinion:

> Watching and listening, spying and overhearing, are of overwhelming importance in this play. There is a subtle and deliberate emphasis on the five senses, their proper functions, and the physical and spiritual sickness that beset them. (137)

However, he does not directly treat the senses as cultural formations, which is the approach undertaken in my analysis.

According to the contemporary, revolutionary approach to the senses, sensual perception may be understood as an unstable cultural formation undergoing changes over time, that is, "an ever-shifting social and historical construct" (Bull et al. 5). Constance Classen reminds us that

> [i]n the West we are accustomed to thinking of perception as a physical rather than a cultural act. The five senses simply gather data about the world. Yet even our time-honored notion of there being five senses is itself a cultural construction. Some cultures recognize more senses, and other cultures fewer. (*Worlds of Sense* 2)

Seeing and hearing fulfil many cultural functions, such as determining our cognition, being the tools of power relations, or conditioning our sensations. Both are considered to be the highest senses, among which sight occupies "something of a hegemonic position in Western culture" (M. Smith 19). Consequently, in this culture, vision has ruled the empire of the senses in sensory history in the past centuries.[1]

Hanna Arendt pays attention to the fact that "[t]he predominance of sight is so deeply embedded in Greek speech, and therefore in our conceptual language, that we seldom find any consideration bestowed on it, as though it belonged, among things too obvious to be noticed" (111). With respect to *Hamlet*, expressions that include the words "eye(s)" and "see" occur in the text 38 and 83 times, respectively. Important words connected with aural perception: "ear(s)" (25 times) and "hear" (58 times), are used with a lesser frequency (Caldwell 140–41). Sense-words, be it in a metaphorical or in a literal sense, appear frequently in the play. The intensified usage of other related expressions, such as "look" and "watch" or "listen," reinforces the significant function of visual and aural perception in the play. *Hamlet*'s sense imagery, on the one hand, has aural and visual perception as an essential source of truth and cognition, while, on the other hand, sight and hearing emerge as deceitful and manipulative informants. As Joan Webber notes:

> Sensory images are contemptuous. The play focuses us on the centrality of thought and thought-processes to the human character, and on the abuses of thought and of perception. Eye and ear are traditionally the purest of the human senses, even though easily deceived. Words like "look", "watch", and "see" run like a motif through the play: people use their eyes to observe or spy; they river them upon one another's faces. Pictures, images, plays-within-a-plays are constantly used or discussed; if eyes have grown unseeing, they must be retrained in observation. (86)

Webber also comments on the role of aural perception, claiming that

> [e]ars, like eyes, are frequently mentioned. Hamlet Senior was killed by having poison poured into his ears. The ears of the people of Denmark and the court are constantly filled with rumors, with lies and gossip; flattery is a familiar technique. Thus the ear can be incapacitated by false seeming just as the eye can; and the ear can also choose to accept false rumor as the truth. (87)

Both eyes and ears serve as tools of perception either connecting the protagonists with the outer world or disconnecting them from it. This ambiguous attitude towards the senses alternating between confidence and distrust was characteristic of early modern thought.

[1] This is not only because of specific biological facts: human beings primarily experience reality through their eyes, but also because cultural implications of exploring vision surpass the social usage and the role of other senses.

Despite uncertainties surrounding it, visual perception played a crucial role in the fashioning of the modern conception of the self. Alison Thorne contends that "[i]t is generally accepted that the end of sixteenth century was a crucial moment in the formation of the individual self, a moment when the subject acquired a sharper sense of particularity and its power to shape or 'fashion' its own identity" (104). In *Sensory History*, Mark M. Smith argues that this modern self aspired to be "a spectator viewing the world, supposedly detached and observing" (23). This understanding of the self entails a quest for both self-knowledge through an inward act of seeing and an examination of the external reality through an outwardly directed act of seeing.

Martin Jay draws conclusions on the modern ocularcentric world, pointing out an extensive range of inventions, such as optical instruments, perspective in art, printing press or surgical practices, which stimulated the eye during the Renaissance and which, afterwards, contributed to visual primacy in the West:

> Whether or not one gives greater weight to technical advances or social changes, it is thus evident that the dawn of the modern era was accompanied by the vigorous privileging of vision. From the curious, observant scientist to the exhibitionist, self-displaying courtier, from the private reader of printed books to the painter of perspectival landscapes, from the map-making colonizer of foreign lands to the quantifying businessman guided by instrumental rationality, modern men and women opened their eyes and beheld a world unveiled to their eager gaze. (68)

As these inventions coincided with the Renaissance, the early phase of modernity can be described as a time of transition for the purposes of sensory studies. It may be regarded as a liminal and, therefore, transgressive period when crucial perception-related changes occurred, specifically the transition from an acoustically-orientated reality towards a visually-embedded perception of the world. If one considers McLuhan's notion that every culture generates and acts according to an "order of sensory preferences" (241), then Shakespeare's times escape any rigid classification. A disruption in the sensory order, a suspension of the hierarchy between the senses and the emergence of subversive values characterize the early modern period, unable to privilege either the eye or the ear.

Bruce R. Smith's pronouncement that "[k]nowing the world through sound is fundamentally different from knowing the world through vision" (129) provokes us to ruminate on the process of the acquisition of knowledge as well as some pivotal functions of hearing in Western culture.[2] As a cultural formation, the sense of hearing has been associated with several rudimentary meanings in the West. One of the references attributed to the ear pertains to its vulnerability, particularly it being "always in operation, unreflectively

[2] Aural perception cannot be equal to visual perception if judged by the intensity of academic research on hearing. Mark M. Smith believes it is high time scholars challenged "their deafness to the aural worlds of the past" (137).

accumulative, and naively open to even the most harmful of loud, high or concussive sounds" (Schwartz 487). Absorbing uninvited sounds that are elusive in their nature, the ear is traditionally considered to be not as reliable a source of knowledge as the eye. In identifying truth and objectivity and capturing events, the status of hearing comes a poor second when compared to seeing. In aural/oral cultures, especially before modernity, people had confidence in sounds pre-eminently in the form of storytelling and everyday speech. Yet the transgressive time was about to appear with the early modern transition, embracing perceptive values and practices, and bringing changes into the sensory order. With respect to the sensual past, transgression touches upon the revolutionary shift in cultural paradigms, based on the revaluation of the role of the senses and subversion of the sensory hierarchy. Such an overthrowing of the established order initiates a metamorphosis of the sensory order: gradually from the world immersed in aural/oral practices into a visually-dependent reality.[3] Since early modern "eyes and ears" encountered entirely different images and sounds in comparison to contemporary perception, the representation of seeing and hearing is encoded in cultural materials through and with sensory ciphers of the past.

The transgressive character of early modern society − uncertain about the "nature" of its sensual experiences − becomes "visible and audible" on the textual level of *Hamlet*. Literary representations of sensory experiences in the play allow one to examine female ways of perceiving in Shakespeare's times. It is possible to analyze the cultural construction of sensory perception and its reflection in the play through the examination of sensorially-imbued passages of the text, while simultaneously putting them into the broader context of Shakespeare's times. Rembowska-Płuciennik draws attention to the "mutual sensual perception" occurring between any fictional characters (338). She is of the opinion that in a literary text particular "states of the observee" may be identified; they allow for an "insight into the other" (339). Apparently, "the other" emerging from the dialogues is either a male or female protagonist. Curiously enough, the first scene of the play indicates that "there is something wrong with sensory perception," leading each character astray and providing blurred visions or indistinct sounds. In the opening words of the play, Bernardo directs his question "Who's there?" into the night-time void. Bernardo seems to be surrounded by darkness and deafness, which hinders his ability to see an approaching person clearly or recognize his or her voice from a distance. Caldwell summarizes the essence of the play in a few sentences, pointing out the dramatic strategy based on references pertaining to the eyes or ears:

[3] As the case in point, *Hamlet* shows how the tension between two "rational" senses arose in the early modern period. Sensory imagery of the play brings up the issue related to the Renaissance "wrestling between sight and hearing." These two senses compete as organs of perception for the mastery of the empire of the senses.

> It opens with Barnardo and Francisco watching for the Ghost. We then shift to Gertrude and Claudius in council, watched by the ostentatiously silent Hamlet, who, summoned outside by Horatio and Marcellus, himself joins the vigil. When the Ghost reappears, Horatio and Marcellus follow, carefully observing the meeting. Polonius hatches the plot to spy on Hamlet: "at each eat a hearer" (2.2.388-89). Hamlet devises the plot to stage a play to be watched by Gertrude and Claudius, while he and Horatio in turn watch them. After the mousetrap is sprung, Hamlet watches Claudius at prayer and is in turn overheard by Polonius during the closet scene. In the company of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet then watches Fortinbras' army cross the stage. Immediately thereafter we see Horatio, Gertrude, and Claudius observing, but doing nothing about, the mad Ophelia. Hamlet returns from the voyage to watch Ophelia's funeral procession; Claudius and Gertrude watch while Hamlet and Laertes struggle in the grave; and finally, in an ironic parody both of these scene and the play-within-a-play, Claudius arranges to watch a performance, the mock duel between Hamlet and Laertes, from which the bloody and precipitous denouement follows. (138)

With their eyes and ears wide open, all Shakespeare's characters are portrayed as sensorially interacting with each other and the mysterious surroundings of Elsinore.

Ophelia's and Gertrude's experiences through their senses differ from those of the male characters in the play. The sensory code which delineates boundaries of human perception, like many other cultural codes, deprives the female characters of their own audition and vision. Both Ophelia and Gertrude are portrayed as breaking the rules that exist in Renaissance society by perceptual transgression. Representations of women's sight and hearing form a sensory minority. Although presented from Shakespeare's, and thus a male, point of view, marginal sensory experiences of Ophelia and Gertrude become a potential source of information about cultural constructions of the senses in early modern times. It is perhaps worth mentioning here that gendering of visual and aural perception in the transitional Shakespearean era prevents the human sensorium from being universalized and ahistoricized. A gender-based distinction of sensory perception assumes that each of the senses has either feminine or masculine inclinations. Such a distinction was popular and prevailed in pre-modernity.

Constance Classen investigates how "the senses are inflected with gender values" (*Color* 63). She also distinguishes how meanings attributed to the cultural constructions of the senses and gender produce specific links (in other words, new cultural formations) between each sense and either masculinity or femininity, for instance, the "male gaze" and the "female touch." According to Classen:

> Women have traditionally been associated with the senses in Western culture, and in particular, with the "lower" senses. Women are forbidden taste, the mysterious smell, the dangerous touch. Men, by contrast, have been associated with reason, as opposed to the senses, or else with sight and hearing as the most "rational" of the senses. The occultation

> of the sensory underpinnings of Western culture by the modern visual and rational world view may therefore be read as an occultation of certain feminine dimensions of that culture. (*Color* 2)

This quotation, in which hearing and sight are presented at the top of the hierarchy of the senses, demonstrates that the significance of aural and visual perception contributes to the marginalization of other sensory receivers and transmitters. The sensory code of *Hamlet* − which is manifested through the use of expressions that evoke any of the senses − reveals how elevating or downplaying of sensory perception by Shakespeare may reflect social meanings added to the senses. The eclipse of feminine sensory values contributed to the underpinning of the patriarchal system in Western culture, but simultaneously a reversal within the hierarchy of the senses in the early modern culture left some space for women's particular manner of seeing and hearing. This space opens up possibilities for subversive perceptual behaviour, violating the rational/masculine usage of the sense of sight and hearing.

Along with the idea of gendering of the senses came the modern concept of the disembodied self. Since *Hamlet* is a liminal play, suspended between a pre-modern understanding of sensory perception and the modern cultural approach to the senses, it also reflects the clash between a "unifying" pre-Cartesian and a "separating" Cartesian paradigm of subjectivity. The latter was practically just emerging at the time and its reflection in the text of the play was rather more of an intellectual prediction of "things to come" made by Shakespeare than an actual mimesis of a deep-seated philosophical thought of the period. The shift in the comprehension of the self coincided with and influenced the change in the interpretation of the sense of vision. The emerging model of subjectivity dichotomized the body and the mind, and divided the self into corporeal and rational parts. This dualistic notion of the self embraced the empire of the senses, affecting sight by discovering the split within visual perception. Seeing functions in two dimensions: the inward − as a source of perception of the mind, or the outward – passively operating as a channel, providing stimuli from the outside. It is vision that is deployed in *Hamlet* to signal the transition in the conceptualization of the self as well as its resonance in "splitting of the eye" between the mind and the body.

Seeing with the mind's eye is presented in *Hamlet* as the male privilege connected with having the power to investigate and speculate, constructing knowledge about the world, being a reliable eye-witness and an active perceptual participant whereas the corporeal eye, which symbolically expresses women's sight, is characterized by the biological attribute of accepting external stimuli, passivity and therefore the inability to transform observation into knowledge. Manifestation on the textual level of the play that representations of visual perception in *Hamlet* differentiate in respect to gender connects sensory

imagery of the play with gender symbolism underlying early modern culture. Undoubtedly visual perception may be exploited by each gender. Making use of the masculine sense to some extent deprived women of their perspective and limited their ability to use sight in rational and contemplative ways as men did. Classen contends that

> [i]n the case of each sense, men would typically be associated with what were thought to be the nobler qualities of that sense, and women with the more ignoble. As regards sight, for example, men were ideally imagined to employ this sense for intellectual activities such as studying, while women made use of it for the sensual ends of acquiring gaudy clothes and admiring themselves in the mirror. Similarly, men were imagined to use the sense of hearing to listen to weighty discourses, while women employed their hearing to attend to frivolous gossip and love talk. (*Color* 66)

Early modern perceptual paradigms accorded with the strictly patriarchal demands of society in which women's transgression was too portentous for recognizable standards of femininity. The culture of the transitional Shakespearean era considered specific sensory behaviours as transgressive, e.g., rational exercise of the senses by women. Therefore, how women "should use" their eyes and ears was of particular interest to society. Limited in their "perceptual field" of existence, through perceptive subversiveness, women in *Hamlet* appear to express their anger and to protest against cultural confinements imposed on them.

Violation of the established modes of sensing by women becomes evident in the form of significant textual interruptions, that is to say, representations of transgressive acts of perception in the play. A case in point may be Ophelia's metamorphosis from a submissive daughter and sister taking the perspective of men (or being forced to internalize such mode of perceiving) to a madwoman creating her own illuminating visions. Although throughout the play Ophelia is being manipulated by her father, brother and even Hamlet, who attempt to impose their point of view on her perspective, she finds perceptual freedom in insanity. The submissiveness of the corporeal eye becomes clear when, for example, Polonius rebukes his daughter for being too naïve in believing Hamlet's declarations of love. Ophelia is left with pure observations but not allowed to transform them into confirming knowledge. When the father asks her: "Do you believe his 'tenders', as you call them?" (1.3.102), Ophelia replies: "I do not know, my lord, what should I think" (1.3.103). Perhaps the bombardment with too many images and representations of womanhood − produced by men − cause mental chaos that engenders Ophelia's madness. Yet it is not until she loses her mind that she experiences the sensory transgression. With her somatic eyes boring into nothingness, Ophelia pours out the excess of the images anchored in her mind's eye through prophetic speeches and songs of an

abandoned lover. Her visions seem to go beyond the imagination of the viewers witnessing the "spectacle of insanity."

In the same scene of madness, hearing is also portrayed as a sense which is used by Ophelia in a subversive manner. Nowhere is it more evidently manifested than through the lines working to show the inattentive audition of the madwoman, focused on the voices in her head. Ophelia offers ambiguous answers to those who interrupt her nonsensical speeches or bawdy songs. To the Queen's question: "Alas, sweet lady, what imports this song?" she responds: "Say you? Nay, pray you, mark" (4.5.27–28) as if she is not paying attention to what has been said. By subverting the role of a woman as a passive hearer, she (un)consciously employs her hearing to "shut her ears" to unwanted words uttered by others. The refusal to take notice of sounds directed at her attests to crossing sensory boundaries. It leads to finding one's own voice regardless of the voices that try to reach Ophelia. Contrastingly, before Ophelia takes leave of her senses, her depiction by Shakespeare suggests that she is the "blind" eye-witness and "voiceless" hearer, left with pure visual and aural sensations but not allowed to transform them into rational understanding. Ophelia's reflections and judgments become shaped and verified by Polonius' and Laertes' opinions, that is to say, by their incorporeal eye. Under the watchful gaze of men, Ophelia becomes powerless in speech and vision. Empowered by "altered states of perception," the woman openly expresses her standpoint by drawing mental pictures that "would make one think there might be thought" (4.5.12) and pours "the poison of deep grief" (4.5.81) into the "ears" of the Elsinore court.

Another example of the transgressive female character in the play is the sensually and sexually subversive Queen Gertrude. Although the eyes of a mourner should be closed to physical attractiveness of the male body while the ears should resist any verbal temptation, for instance, men's seductive voices or erotic allusions, Gertrude shortens the period of grieving by remarrying her dead husband's brother. She does not properly fulfil the role of a mourning widow and, as she hastily remarries, she rejects expectations surrounding a woman who has lost her husband. However, this refusal cannot be treated as a conscious transgression since Gertrude does not remain an independent woman. The Queen acts as if she was blinded in a literal and figurative sense of the word, as if she was led astray by her eyes, which made her vision function defectively and therefore unable to detect that her husband's murderer was his brother. Gertrude non-cogitatively absorbs seductive images from the outside world and yields her perspective to Claudius' worldview. The symbolic attributes of the female somatic eye, such as submissiveness or disempowerment of independent judgment, become evident when Gertrude takes the perspective of her second husband.

Gertrude's improper response to the mourning period results in verbal criticism from Hamlet, who enumerates the stages she should go through after the loss of her husband. Instead of performing the role of the widow, manifesting her sorrow through "windy suspiration of forced breath," "the fruitful river in the eye" and "the dejected haviour of the visage" (1.2.79–81), Gertrude opens her senses to the visual and aural attractions of her second marriage. In a pivotal scene of the play, during Gertrude's encounter with Hamlet in her closet, two gendered ways of perceiving are contrasted. The Queen's visual perception dominated by the somatic eye is set in opposition to Hamlet's activation of his mind's eye. The gendering of the eye is revealed through the dialogue which prioritizes Hamlet's masculinized point of view. He endeavours to enlighten his mother about King Hamlet's death. Unable to believe that Gertrude chose Claudius as her second husband, Hamlet uses a picture contrasting his father with his uncle: "Here is your husband like a mildewed ear / Blasting his wholesome brother" (3.4.62–63). Hamlet takes advantage of being allowed by culture to express male supremacy over women by aggressively interrogating his mother: "Have you eyes?" (3.4.63) and aiming to undermine the reliability in Gertrude's visual perception.

Hearing is in the case of Gertrude mostly employed to listen to opinions given by Claudius, which places her under control of male voices. As the plot reveals, the Queen either appears alongside Claudius or faces his entrance in each act. This textual strategy imposed by Shakespeare may imply that Gertrude's audition is exposed to male speeches, which results in abating her voice and weakening the power to affect men's hearing. Although she has maternal power over her son, she seems to be ignored by not being obeyed. She meets with violent, abusive and ear-piercing words uttered by Hamlet, intending to drown out the audibility of Gertrude's voice, especially in the closet scene. Her verbal reactions are mostly provoked by Hamlet's offensive manner of speaking.

It should be stated here that ultimately the Queen also transgressively exploits visual perception in order to trespass its passivity and fleshiness. Firstly, Shakespeare portrays Gertrude as a person who becomes enchanted by what her bodily eyes communicate about the world outside and follows the passionate scopic drive, which leads her into "incestuous sheets." What constitutes Gertrude's transgression is her refusal to obey the command of Claudius in the final scene of the play when an opportunity to exploit audition subversively appears. The Queen negatively responds to Claudius' command that she should not drink from the cup and she decides to produce knowledge independently of any masculine point of view. Before she dies, after drinking the poisonous drink, her eyes meaningfully express her motherly love for Hamlet and disappointment with her relation with men. She willingly activates her mind's eye to speculate

and reflect on the events taking place in Elsinore. Gertrude passes away as a transgressive character who crossed boundaries of women's perception.

It is apparent that Shakespeare was not sensorially indifferent. Representations of sight and hearing are deployed in *Hamlet* to highlight their masculine attributes and reflect sensory preferences of the early modern period. Gendering of the sensory experience in *Hamlet* pertains to the textual coding of the play. Linguistic images of transgressive female perception emerge from juxtaposing them with depictions showing male sensory experience. Analyzing early modern distinctions in sensing between men and women demonstrates that pivotal gender differences and inequalities in accessibility and exploitation of the senses existed. Sensorially symbolized gender has a specific code referring to the ways in which men and women use their senses in social life. The ear and the eye are significant cultural carriers for the Renaissance period, conveying metaphorical and literal meanings. Transgression that occurred in Shakespeare's times revealed that "[t]he way a society senses is the way it understands" (Classen, "McLuhan" 161). Not only did Shakespeare portray early modern society's suspension between two modes of sensing, and thus thinking, but he also created gendered representations of sight and hearing which become "visible and audible" on the textual level of *Hamlet*.

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The Nature of Contemporary Catharsis in Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats…*

Abstract: Hester Swane, the protagonist of Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats...*, one of the most subversive female characters in modern Irish drama, is a contemporary Medea. As her suffering becomes extreme and her despair escalates, she performs a mercy killing of her own child. Carr uses the Greek source and adds some contemporary (psychological) circumstances to create her play and her heroine. This results in a new type of tragedy and a new type of catharsis potentially experienced by the audience.

It is this relation between the fiction of art and the reality of life that is the main subject of the present considerations. Tragedy has always been more than a representation of a tragic experience. Its role of stirring emotions, however, should be reassessed and looked at from a perspective other than that of Aristotle's pity and fear. The workings of a tragedy upon the contemporary psyche are also to be demonstrated to be much different than just an abreaction and a discharge of emotional tensions or ventilation of feelings. These theories of catharsis should be reconsidered and the psychoanalytical perspective replaced with the most recent findings of cognitive-behavioural therapy in psychology.

The application of the emotion exposure procedure used in psychotherapy to the understanding of the nature of contemporary catharsis in modern tragedy introduces a link between theories concerned with the way drama affects the audience that were previously found exclusive: the dramatic theatre and the epic theatre. The contemporary tragedy, as it is demonstrated by the analysis of Marina Carr's play, engages viewers' emotions and empathy and awakens (re)cognition just like cognitive-behavioural therapy involves both emotion exposure and cognitive restructuring.

> *Stories serve to address psychic as well as physical suffering. Stories were invented to fill the gaping hole within us, to assuage our fear and dread, to try to give answers to the great unanswerable questions of existence.* (Kearney 6–7)

Marina Carr's dramatic career has always been linked with the distortion of theatrical norms. Her pictures of reality are not just mimetic representations, but powerful images embracing vast areas of human existence and experience. Hester Swane, the protagonist of *By the Bog of Cats...*, is one of the most subversive characters in modern Irish drama: she represents a contemporary

Medea. The extremity of her human, womanly and maternal suffering is rendered in the play by a portrayal of the act of mercy killing of her only child and the subsequent suicide of the tragic heroine. Carr uses the Greek source and adds contemporary circumstances in the process of creating her play and her protagonists' psychological picture. The result is a new type of a tragedy and a new type of contemporary catharsis potentially experienced by the audience.

The intricate relation between the fiction of art and the reality of life is one of the most intriguing aspects of the nature and reception of dramatic works. Tragedy, for instance, has always been perceived as something more than just a representation of a tragic experience. Its nature has been linked to that of a scapegoat-ritual, yet evidently standing for something more than that. As Leech phrases it: "[A]ny successful tragedy makes us feel simultaneously that we have done with the situation and that we are still desperately concerned with it" (55). The notion of Aristotelian catharsis, purification or cleansing through the process of experiencing emotions of pity and fear, is one of the most often used concepts with reference to tragedy, but still not fully comprehended. A modest attempt being made here is to look at the way tragedy affects its audiences and to present a link between spectators' reactions, like a discharge of emotional tensions or ventilation of feelings usually related to the notion of cathartic purification, and mental processes responsible for cognition resulting from these experiences.

Psychoanalysis is a well-established school of literary criticism; however, we cannot forget that first of all it served as a therapy for mental disorders, being the so-called talking cure (Burzyńska and Markowski 47). The way Freud used it to examine human psyche is mirrored in the way psychoanalytical literary critics perceive meanings of texts. However, if we take a closer look at what stage psychology and psychotherapy are at today, one certainly cannot escape noticing that psychological study is far ahead of the discoveries of Sigmund Freud at the beginning of the twentieth century. Contemporary psychology has established a number of therapeutic methods in order to help people make adaptive changes. These methods follow particular theoretical perspectives and the most effective among them nowadays seems to be cognitive-behavioural therapy (Lawyer, Normandin, and Roberts) as the huge empirical support base for the application of its principles proves. My intention is to demonstrate that some of the techniques used in this kind of therapy can be compared to what contemporary playwrights like Marina Carr do to their audiences through their dramatic works. What is more, an application of procedures used in cognitive-behavioural therapy to the understanding of the nature of catharsis in modern tragedy introduces a link between theories concerned with the way drama affects audiences that were previously found mutually exclusive: the dramatic theatre and the epic theatre (Brecht, "Modern Theatre"). As demonstrated by a brief

analysis of Marina Carr's play, contemporary tragedy evokes viewers' emotions, their empathy and (re)cognition, just like cognitive-behavioural therapy involves both emotion exposure and cognitive restructuring.

In the programme note for the Abbey Theatre, Frank McGuinness wrote: "*By the Bog of Cats...* is a play about sorrow. Therefore it must be funny" (87), thus underscoring a multitude of at times paradoxical contrasts underlying the structure of any play by Marina Carr. The playwright's imagination always fluctuates between the living and the dead. She "writes in Greek," as McGuinness phrases it (88), and seems to be embedded in the world of the classical ancient Greece with its myths and gods, yet she creates a very contemporary play about a strong, independent woman who withstands every pang of fortune only to commit suicide in the end. Set in Carr's native Irish Midlands, her plays typically raise issues of universal implications. Euripides' classic tragedy of betrayal and vengeance, the story of Medea's bloody revenge, is re-told by Carr as a tale of the rage of many women, not only Irish ones.

Marina Carr emphasized that her plays should be read and treated primarily as texts (Wallace 53). She has been appreciated as "a storyteller with a lyrical bent whose work combines poetic and narrative qualities" (Ni Dhuibhne 66). Her *By the Bog of Cats...* is then a story of women's suffering. The tragic reversal of fortune (peripeteia) starts when the forty-year-old Hester Swane is abandoned by the father of Josie, their child, for a younger woman and witnesses the wedding ceremony together with her daughter. It turns out that Hester's whole life has indeed been marked by a sense of loss, exclusion and abandonment. She is forsaken by her mother at the age of seven, left by her man, evicted from her house and marginalized, or even cast away, from the intolerant community of the Bog of Cats. When the ultimate blow seems inevitable, the taking away of her daughter, Hester decides to escape her sorrowful life together with the little girl.

The world we see is a world perceived through the troubled eyes of a suffering woman who transgresses norms out of a desperate need to win her man back. She is driven by passion and, like tragic heroines from the Greek tragedy, she is doomed from the beginning. Scene one features Hester trailing the corpse of a black swan after her (Carr 265). She is presented as functioning on the verge of two worlds: the one of earthly suffering and death, symbolized by the swan, and the supernatural one. She converses with the Ghost Fancier, who comes to take her life, but, apparently by mistake, comes a few hours too early. By saying: "Then I'm too previous. I mistook this hour for dusk. A thousand apologies" (266), the Ghost Fancier presents the viewers with prolepsis and does not leave space for speculation as to the future of the woman. In response, we hear a human voice of an ordinary mother, the voice any mother on earth can sympathise with:

> HESTER. (*shouts after him*) Come back! – I can't die – I have a daughter. (267)

It becomes clear that following the formula of classical tragedy, Hester is about to commit some tragic error of judgment. In order for the audience to follow the process that finally leads to the heroine's tragic death, the playwright decides to immerse the viewers in the world of Hester's despair, to expose them to the most drastic psychic experiences (pathos) and, subsequently, to provoke them to try to analyze the situation in such a way as to evoke cognition and allow for some more adaptive ways of viewing the world to develop. A number of social factors and problems are addressed and *By the Bog of Cats...* seems able to move audiences' emotions while an attempt is made to restructure their way of thinking and ways of dealing with trauma. At the same time, some vital, provocative questions about the condition of society are asked.

One of the most effective psychotherapeutic techniques used in the treatment of a variety of psychological disorders, including post-traumatic stress disorder, general anxiety disorder, depression and others, is emotion exposure. The goal of it is to elicit particular emotions so that the patient has the opportunity to practice techniques of controlling them. If we treat emotion exposure as the "behavioural" component of the cognitive-behavioural therapy, then it seems essential to remember the words of Albert Bandura, whose

> social learning theory outlined the conditions under which behaviours can be learned in the absence of direct contact with the consequences. For example, behaviours could be learned via modelling simply by watching others perform the behaviour and perceiving the consequences. (Lawyer, Normandin, and Roberts 324)

When watching an on-stage re-creation of emotions, theatrical audiences are not only allowed to deal with their own past and present emotional experiences but they are also frequently granted insight into the emotional areas that would otherwise be denied them.

A significant moment in a sequence of Hester Swane's outbursts of pain and anguish comes when she enters the wedding of her former partner. She is wearing her old wedding dress and veil (Carr 311). This is, in fact, the last moment in the play when she still tries to appeal to other people's empathy. She addresses the ones responsible for her suffering: she begs Carthage, the bridegroom, to come home with her and their daughter (313), asks him to let her live in the house at least (314), and argues she just cannot leave the place as she must wait for the mother, who abandoned her as a seven-year-old girl (315–16). She expresses herself even in front of Carthage's mother, who has always hated her:

> HESTER. Have you ever been discarded, Elsie Kilbride? – the way I've been discarded. Do ya know what that feels like? To be flung on the ashpit and you still alive? (313)

As Hester does not find sympathy in anyone, she feels more and more humiliated up to the point when she understands that her only choice is revenge.

In his 1928 *Tragedy in relation to Aristotle's Poetics*, Frank Laurence Lucas stated that

> [i]t is the perpetual tragic irony of the Tragedy of Life that again and again men do thus laboriously contrive their own annihilation, or kill the thing they love. . . . For the most poignant tragedy of human life is the work of human blindness – the Tragedy of Errors. (qtd. in Leech 62)

Although the audience may observe Hester's suffering with compassion and somehow identify with her suffering and despair, when recognition concerning the final outcome of her actions comes, one certainly comprehends that even in the most difficult situations and agitated state of mind, one should never resort to revenge and let self-destruction take over. It is not that, as Binstock puts it, "any mental illness will benefit from an emotional paroxysm" (499). Our witnessing of extreme emotions of the kind presented in *By the Bog of Cats...* seems to serve similar aims as the emotion exposure technique in cognitive-behavioural therapy: to prevent emotional avoidance and to make a conscious effort to combat problems associated with it possible (which in psychotherapy is called "emotional awareness training"; Allen, McHugh, and Barlow 232).

All the subsequent actions of Hester Swane after the dramatic self-disclosure at the wedding inevitably lead to the final catastrophe. She sets fire to the house of Carthage and his newly-wed wife and meets her murdered brother's ghost. During the encounter with the apparition, Hester does not express any remorse for the fact that she once killed him; she only discloses her reasons for doing so: fury and jealousy about their mother (Carr 317–21). The conversation with the ghost exposes Hester's major fault and weakness: the inability to cope with her past and with the fact of having been abandoned by the mother in particular. Living in the past and cultivating old wounds makes any future impossible. When Hester decides to commit suicide and says goodbye to her daughter, she realizes that the seven-year old will always be waiting for her, just like she has been waiting for her mother to come back all her life (337–39). This is Hester's anagnorisis, a discovery and a change from ignorance to knowledge. From the viewpoint of the audience, however, the mercy killing of her child and suicide are acts of subversion. Hester lets the unthinkable happen and, unlike the mythical Medea, she is not elevated at the end. She transgresses the limits of the mortal realm but the audience is left with a feeling that her fate could have been avoided.

In *Groaning Tears*, Elise P. Garrison admits that one of the motives for suicide in the Greek world was to avoid further suffering (29). However, citing Aristotle's *Nichomechean Ethics*, she states that it is

> the mark of a coward to die to escape from poverty or love or anything painful, because it exhibits softness to escape from what is troublesome. This kind of person does not die because it is noble, but only to escape evil. (30)

Garrison underscores that the Greek tragedians played the role of moral educators of society. Although ancient Greek societies differ considerably from contemporary ones, it is not impossible to draw some parallels. The major one here is that an individual's functioning is necessarily related to the social environment he or she lives in. As Emile Durkheim states, suicide rates are a measure of the health of the social body (qtd. in Garrison 36).

The cognition of the relation between Hester Swane's fate and the social factors arises when one takes into consideration the way Marina Carr draws the picture of the community of the Bog of Cats. There are at least three moral maladies within the community as enumerated by Rosana Herrero Martin: materialism, intolerance and psychic abnormality of some of its members. All these vices are best represented by the figure of Hester's mother-in-law, Mrs Kilbride. When she first enters the stage, she behaves in a verbally abusive way towards her granddaughter, Josie. She does not let the girl win in a game of snap; calls her thick (277), "little bastard" (278) and "little coward" (279); offends the girl's mother (277, 280) and boasts about her savings (280). She photographs her shoes during her son's wedding ceremony and implores the bride and the bridegroom to ask how much they were. Her materialistic ostentation typical of the newly rich does not allow her to remain silent about the shoes' price so she obviously feels compelled to state:

> MRS KILBRIDE. (*smug, can hardly believe it herself*) A hundred and fifty pound. The Quane herself wouldn't pay more. (304)

Mrs Kilbride's wedding speech discloses a severe psychological problem related to the way she perceives the role her son plays in her life. What she says is both pathetic and appalling:

> MRS KILBRIDE. When his father died he used to come into bed to sleep beside me for fear I would be lonely. Often I woke from a deep slumber and his two arms would be around me, a small leg thrown over me in sleep. . . . If Carthage will be as good a son to Caroline as he's been a husband to me then she'll have no complaints. (*Raises her glass*). (311)

Another element of the cultural psyche of Ireland is demystified whenever the character of Xavier Cassidy enters the stage: preoccupied solely with land and money, careless even about his wife's and child's deaths (Carr 305). It

becomes clear that the true reasons for Hester's downfall, mental breakdown and suicide are aberrations within the contemporary money-drawn society. Bertolt Brecht proposed that "to portray social processes as seen in their causal relationships" ("Street Scene" 85), a new technique of acting and a new type of theatre are necessary. In order for theatre to gain practical and social significance, it seemed essential for Brecht to exclude emotional engagement on the part of the audience who was to remain aloof to reason and critically assess instead of sympathizing. As it is seen here, the two elements: involving the audience emotionally and bringing it to the point of recognition concerning social issues, do not have to be mutually exclusive.

When cognitive-behavioural psychological theories were first formed, researchers and clinicians simply became sceptical as to the separation of human behaviour and cognition. Behavioural therapy generally avoided focusing on mental events, such as thoughts, whereas, as empirical studies started to confirm, dysfunctional thoughts tended to diminish as a result of behavioural change (Lawyer, Normandin, and Roberts 324). Similarly, emotions aroused by a theatrical play, the sympathy of the audience towards tragic heroes and heroines may not necessarily possess a purging, cleansing power *per se* (certainly not with reference to societies), but by making viewers emotionally involved in the tragic fates of the protagonists, a concern for larger social and political issues can be induced.

The relationship between the fiction of art and the reality of life is a complex one. As Świontek notices, psychological processes within a theatrical viewer's psyche result from a simultaneous acceptance of something he or she treats as real (thanks to the theatrical illusion) and something which is denied this reality, some element that is treated merely as an image, although the two things are in fact the same scenic sign. The complementary nature of the mechanism described by Świontek implies the workings of distance and identification, conventionality and reality (165). The distance that arises from the awareness that there is a clear borderline between the reality of life and the fiction of art makes theatre a perfect place for emotional and cognitive excursions that can only be dreamt of by many psychotherapists. Recently, virtual reality technologies have been incorporated in the exposure-based therapies in clinical psychology (Lawyer, Normandin, and Roberts 327). Yet, as early as in 1976, Martin Esslin stated:

> Play is a simulation of reality. That, far from making play a frivolous pastime, in fact emphasizes the immense importance of all play activity for the well-being and development of man. . . . When a fine play in a fine performance coincides with a receptive audience in the theatre, this can produce a concentration of thought and emotion which leads to an enhanced degree of lucidity, of emotional intensity that amounts to a higher level of spiritual insight and can make such an experience akin to a religious one, a memorable high-point in an individual's life. (19, 26)

At the same time, theatre often brings into open burning social issues of the time so the theatrical situation is a perfect environment for both personal and social change, or, at least, for increased awareness.

Tragedy writers across the ages have always employed pictures of the most difficult experiences a human being can potentially face. In reality, a tragic event is nearly always simply devastating, but the theatrical portrayal of madness, trauma and despair is something generically expected. Emotion exposure and cognitive processes that result from such portrayals are powerful tools in the hands of contemporary playwrights and directors. Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats...* is a play capable of stirring strong emotions of every abandoned woman and of every mother, whereas a cognitive restructuring of the classical understanding of the role of fate in human life can be best summarized by the Catwoman's words: "Curses only have the power ya allow them" (276).

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Gender/Genre Disruption in Bryony Lavery's *Her Aching Heart*

Abstract: The objective of the present paper is to examine the two contrastive yet interconnected processes activated in parody: conservative and revolutionary. The conservative drive is associated with the continuation and reinforcement of the parodied original while the revolutionary drive refers to the transgressive and critical potential of the parodic text, often realised in mockery, satire or deconstruction. *Her Aching Heart* by Bryony Lavery, a parody of a Gothic romance, displays both of these tendencies, which in their interplay and opposition lead to the point of the cultural disruption in an attempt at lesbian representation.

The parody of the Gothic historical romance in *Her Aching Heart* is performed through exaggeration, replacement and experiment in gender roles distribution. With the Gothic romance's heavy dependence on clear gender oppositions, Lavery's exploration of the same-sex casting, multiple role-playing, and cross-dressing necessarily and subversively redefines the genre's formula, leading to the point of its disintegration. In this respect, the play can be classified as self-parodic and self-referential. Its interest lies in questioning the possibility of representation of alternative forms of love within as well as without the convention of romance, and thus indirectly searching for the possibility of formulating alternative lesbian dramaturgy.

Bryony Lavery's *Her Aching Heart* (1990) was described by Lizbeth Goodman as a lesbian play addressed to both heterosexual and homosexual audiences, offering both entertainment and political commitment, experimenting with traditional theatre and literary forms, and presenting serious themes "lightly through comedy" (143). *Her Aching Heart* is thus a non-separatist play (Goodman 121) whose main focus is parody and theatricality explored through cross-dressing and role transformation. The level of lesbian commitment in the play can be best represented by Lavery's playful admission in the introduction to the published text that having "discovered a mutual addiction to romantic fiction" with the director of the performance, they "decided, courageously, to Come Out" (xii). The playful use of the expression of coming out in relation to popular romance problematises its cultural status as both popular fiction for women and the subject for academic research, which still, in the early 1990s, remained, according to Kim Clancy, questionable (131). In relation to lesbian identity the expression of coming out highlights the significant confrontation between the traditionally heterosexual form of the romance parodied by Lavery and the same sex relationship which is central to the play.

Despite its common connotations with mockery and satire, parody both transgresses and sustains its referent. Its subversive liminal potential of breaking or transcending the norm or convention paradoxically celebrates and perpetuates the parodied original. As Linda Hutcheon asserts: "[P]arody is fundamentally double and divided; its ambivalence stems from the dual drives of conservative and revolutionary forces that are inherent in its nature as authorized transgression" (26). Furthermore, Hutcheon stresses parody's reliance on the acknowledgment of the rules prior to their transformation in parody:

> [P]arody posits, as a prerequisite to its very existence, a certain aesthetic institutionalisation which entails the acknowledgement of recognisable, stable forms and conventions. These function as norms or as rules which can – and therefore, of course, shall – be broken. (75)

But this transgression, like the liminal stage of rituals, is a temporary and, in fact, limited suspension of the rules in this particular text, leaving the general idea of the parodied genre or text untouched. As Hutcheon further argues:

> The parodic text is granted a special licence to transgress the limits of convention, but, as in the carnival, it can do so only temporarily and only within the controlled confines authorized by the text parodied – that is, quite simply, within the confines dictated by 'recognizability.' (75)

In order for the target of parody to remain recognisable, particularly if it is concerned with a genre rather than an individual text, the formula of the genre, which in some cases, like in melodrama or popular romance, is quite rigid, has to be preserved.

1. The Conservative Drive – Continuity

Although the parody of the romantic melodrama with Gothic elements constitutes the most ostentatious layer of *Her Aching Heart*, the play itself has a two-level structure: that of a contemporary relationship between two lesbian characters presented through telephone conversations and that of the historical romantic melodrama depicting the relationship between the two characters from opposite social backgrounds bearing the same names as the characters in the play proper. Both discuss relationships in the pre-engagement period, the one on which popular romances tend to focus. Because of multiple role-playing the two levels constantly interweave with the visual and dramatic domination of the play-within-the-play. The embedded drama can be additionally split into narrative passages and theatrical scenes, evoking a mixture of genres and modes: melodramatic, romantic and Gothic. It is at this level that Lavery's play

functions as a parody and is dominated by the comic and tragicomic mood. The play proper represents a rather realistic and minimalist plot preserving some features of the romance, ending happily in a declaration of love between two women. It is very reticent and hesitant in building an engaging romantic plot. Doubt and uncertainty felt throughout the play proper are faintly exteriorised. However, when received as it is when watched or read, entangled with the plot and peripeteia of the play-within-the-play, it represents a similar latent structure to the popular romantic genre, the difference being that the conflict, uncertainty and intensity of the pre-engagement period are relegated to the embedded drama while the happy ending occurs only in the play proper.

As a parody of a Gothic romance and melodrama, *Her Aching Heart* is both a critical deconstruction of the genre as well as its continuation. Despite its transgression of the rules of the parodied genre, *Her Aching Heart* rewards the basic expectations of the Gothic romance and melodrama to deal with romantic love. The essential formula of the romance presented by Ann Barr Snitow in her study of "Mass Market Romance" – that "all tension and problems arise from the fact that the Harlequin world is inhabited by two species incapable of communicating with each other, male and female" (134) – seems to underlie the whole play, albeit in its same gender realisation. The genre formula also demands for the story of endless conflicts to end in a marriage (Snitow 136). *Her Aching Heart* offers a happy ending of an established relationship; its fulfilment, however, occurs on the level of the play proper, leaving the embedded melodrama unresolved and unfinished both to the contemporary characters and in relation to the genre formula.

The parody of the Gothic historical romance in *Her Aching Heart* is performed through exaggeration and replacement. This is done primarily in the field of gender roles distribution. While the Gothic romantic melodrama is a genre heavily dependent on gender opposition and clear gender distinction, Lavery's play employs the same sex casting, multiple role-playing and cross-dressing. These gender transgressions subvert both the order of the genre as a literary category as well as character definition based on the binary oppositions of male/female and masculine/feminine. However, the degree of this redefinition is restricted by the convention in which even a change of gender cannot discard the polarity of masculine and feminine forces represented by a villain and a maiden. The two female characters of Lady Harriet Helstone and Molly Penhallow are polarised around the melodramatic figures of the villain and a pure country girl. The former is introduced as "rich and lovely, ardent and wilful, the impetuous Lady Harriet Helstone" (Lavery 89) while the latter as "simple, untried eighteen-year-old village maiden" (93). Like in a conventional melodrama, the characters are divided into good and evil without explaining the origin of this polarisation: "Melodrama's mode is Manichaean, the conflict and

confrontation of characters offering polarised moral values, of good and evil, light and darkness" (Docker 252).

Lady Harriet's every action ends in some kind of disaster or suffering as she accidentally kills a fox and a deer loved by Molly, and murders two men in a fight, one to escape the man's advances and the other to gain a disguise in order to flee from the country. Molly, on the other hand, loves all the creatures and has a strange ability to breathe life into them. However, Lavery plays here with the convention making Harriet as much a victim of circumstance as the other characters are while giving Molly a power to cause harm by magic manipulations with a corn doll. A combination of destructive and healing powers creates a number of conflicting comic scenes in which both animals and humans die to be revived by a different character, often to lose their lives in another accident. The plot thus develops around constant conflicts and sudden changes of fortune and mood typical of classic melodrama, which, as John Docker argues, "exteriorises conflict. It makes visible psychic structures at work in relationships and situations. Characters represent extremes and they undergo extremes, passing through 'peripaties', changes of fortune, from heights to depths or the reverse, almost simultaneously" (252). This might be illustrated by the numerous descriptions of the characters' states of mind: ". . . Molly's mind was a turmoil of emotions . . . of heartbreak for the fox, of yearning for the baby roe-deer . . . but most of all . . . there was burning hatred for Lady Harriet Helstone . . ." (Lavery 115). Poetic affection on one page: "Your kiss lights up the sky with fiery rays. It fills my ears with birdsong" (130), turns into "a furious rage" on the other: "You stupid bloody PEASANT!!! Why couldn't you keep your villagey snout out of the business of your high-born betters?" (132).

Such secondary but obligatory elements as travel and the ritual of dressing (Snitow 135) are also present in Lavery's parody, yet either exaggerated or employed for the sake of irony and satire. The complicated rituals of dressing and toilet are an occasion for confronting the social position of the upper and lower classes and its relation to romance. When Lady Harriet, disturbed by the turmoil of emotions experienced after seeing Molly, asks her servant girl to tell her about love, the latter admits that "we servants are not gentle enough for love" (104) because they have to attend to their lady all day and, apart from that, give their sexual services to all the male residents in Helstone Hall, including the landlord. Lady Harriet's comment: "Ah Betsy . . . it is so much harder for we gentry" (104), which touches upon social satire, ironically exposes the class context for the romance: in order to experience a real emotional hardship one has to be in a relatively comfortable economic and power position (cf. Snitow 138).

The strong melodramatic structure and character construction found in *Her Aching Heart* are disturbed by several shifts, repetitions and modifications. Following the original pattern found, for example, in the melodrama of *Maria*

Marten (Shackleton 146), Lavery's play should present a story of Lord Rothermere's seduction and abuse of a pure and simple country girl (Molly) who naively prefers the rich lord to her simple country lover (Joshua), and who then is abandoned to make way for Rothermere's marriage with a rich and well-born lady (Lady Harriet) to save Rothermere from bankruptcy. In a lesbian and substantially feminist revision of this pattern, Lord Rothermere's role partly overlaps with Lady Harriet's function. Lady Harriet appropriates the role of the villain taking over its power and disturbing clear gender distinctions. At the same time, she resists the role of a victim of Rothermere's machinations defending herself in a duel in which, to a certain extent, she also performs a melodramatic function of Rothermere's competitor, the function which is absent in the play. Similarly, Molly's part resists the pattern of a harmed country girl because of her power and education which parody the original weakness and naivety of melodramatic characters. She is not even brought into direct relationship with Rothermere (apart from a narrated event of saving his life) because his role is taken over by Harriet. Thus the pattern of the parodied original is clearly visible beneath the revised text creating tensions, humour and absurdity, and questioning the validity of the genre formula for lesbian representation.

2. The Revolutionary Drive: Transgression

The structure of conflict that controls melodrama and is visible, albeit as a parody, in *Her Aching Heart* is redefined through multiple role-casting and cross-gendered acting. On the one hand, multiple roles attributed to one character polarise the play's structure even more effectively in oppositions organised around each performer. On the other hand, as some of the conflicts seem comic rather than serious because of cross-dressing, the melodramatic structure is presented with a critical Brechtian distance (Brecht 101). This is reinforced by the stage directions which seem to be designed to be read aloud. The introduction of each new character enacted by the same performer is preceded by a similar comment of the following kind: "*Although in these penurious times it may seem that* **Granny** *looks not unlike* **Lady Harriet***, she is in fact a completely different character, being a cheery, nut-cheeked, wise old villager who, unlike her granddaughter, speaks in simple peasant vernacular*" (101) or "**Lord Rothermere** *enters with many starched neckerchiefs. He is trying to tie one round his neck. Although in these penurious times he may bear a* passing *resemblance to* **Molly** *in a curly black wig he is a* completely different person" (119).

Despite comic effects of multiple role-playing and cross-dressing, the speed with which the performers often have to switch roles creates the impression of instability of identity, multiplicity of possibility, but also inability to match the changing requirements of role transformation. For the first half of the performance, the actresses constantly change costumes to enact different fictional characters while in the second part, as the same characters, they primarily disguise as somebody else because of the changing circumstances and complications of the plot. The theatre's potential to experiment with identities, including gender, here also points to the incapacity to fit into the prescribed roles. In this respect, the melodrama formula imposed on character construction generates a sense of misfit and discrepancy. This comic and dramatic play with identities is problematised in one of the songs, which in a Brechtian style, interrupts the performance:

On the seventh day God said
'Well, that's everything
Except I haven't had a laugh all week'
And he started chuckling . . .
'I'll create sex,' he said
'And I'll create love'

'And I'll stick them both together
And watch from above . . .'
It's a suit that won't fit
It's a hat that's too small
It's a pair of big baggy pants
It's the world's funniest joke. (133–34)

The relationship between sexual identity, gender and costume can be further connected with the tendency of lesbian writing described by Bonnie Zimmerman to be fascinated with costuming "because dress is an external manifestation of gender roles lesbians often reject" (91). Theatrical cross-dressing in this context exposes the flexibility of identities, the multiple possibilities and liminal potential – "that slippery sense of a mutable self" (Ferris 9) – in which lesbian identity might be defined.

Lavery's transgressive replacement of genders, reshuffling of roles and reversal of conventions of love representation, destroys the possibility of the emergence of heterosexual romance. It signals – but also questions – another possibility: the possibility of representation of a lesbian love story. When considered independently, the two levels of the play seem to refrain from offering the expected completion or satisfaction: the level of the historical romance offers no formulaic resolution while the play proper offers no sense of conflict to be resolved. When put together, the two plots are simultaneously

radical and conservative, disturbing the pattern but finally completing it. Major effects arise from the interaction between the two levels of the play.

What strikes the reader/viewer in the confrontation between the two plots is a manifest inarticulacy of the dialogue in the play proper contrasted with the excessive expressiveness of the embedded scenes, as in the following example:

Contemporary	**Historical romance**
HARRIET. Oh yes, hello, how are you? MOLLY. Oh . . . you know . . . HARRIET. Oh yes. MOLLY. So. What you up to? HARRIET. Oh me. Well . . . I'm *reading*. MOLLY. Oh no! Me too! (115)	HARRIET. Listen to me peasant!!! I will not have it! Will not have this hate for me! [. . .] I am the wilful, spoilt, impetuous Lady Harriet Helstone of Helstone Hall and I always . . . *always* Get Whatso'er I Want!!! MOLLY. And mark this . . . Lady Harriet Helstone . . . [. . .] I am Molly Penhallow of Penhallow Hollows . . . and I never . . . *never* . . . Give In To Anyone!!! Here . . . [. . .] Now go! (113)

The crisis of communication pervades the whole play: on the level of melodrama because of constant shifts in mood, repetitive misunderstandings and unhappy coincidences and on the level of the play proper because of social constraints on the expression of same sex affection, at some point reinforced by coincidence:

MOLLY. Hello?
HARRIET. Is that you?
MOLLY. Hello . . . I can hardly hear you. . . [. . .]
HARRIET. . . . I miss you.
MOLLY. What? The line's crackling . . .
HARRIET. I miss you!!!
MOLLY. I miss you too!
HARRIET. I love you!
MOLLY. What? You are very faint!
HARRIET. I love you!
MOLLY. I can't hear you [. . .]. (135–36)

However, the two fictional levels split towards the end of the play: while the melodramatic one ends unhappily "and they never saw each other again. The End" (140), the contemporary story culminates in a simple declaration of love. Although here one might argue that instead of the direct declaration, the character repeats what she wanted to say in their telephone conversation. In addition, the final scene seems to take over from the embedded melodrama its sentimentality as a final reference to "their aching hearts" in a parody of a love song.

The failure of the embedded melodramatic romance to end happily, which is also a failure of the romantic structure to deal with a lesbian theme, partly results from the rejection of the active/passive dichotomy defining the role of male and female characters in the genre. Although polarised in their parodied natures, Lavery's characters cannot be divided into submissive and masterful, nor can the structure be defined as coercive and aiming at subordination of women. The same-sex casting makes it impossible to consider the genre as an instance of patriarchal ideology (cf. Light 140–41), while the strength and resistance of the character representing the female part in the romance erases the traces of the original imbalance of gender and power relationships. Without this imbalance, the formulaic union of opposites, which originally was supposed to bridge contradictions, to change brutality of men into romance, to reward the conventional and passive behaviour of women, to finish the war between the sexes "in truce" (Snitow 139), cannot succeed or even come into existence. While in patriarchal culture romance might be seen as "one socially acceptable moment of transcendence" (Snitow 139) for (heterosexual) women, it is difficult to find the equivalent possibility for a homosexual reader unless one takes into consideration the observation made by Janice Radway that "in ideal romances the hero is constructed androgynously" (72), combining masculine power and feminine tenderness and nurturance. In this sense, as Radway further argues, a romance problematises both the possibility and inability of satisfying women's desires in heterosexuality (72). However, the structure of the embedded romance cannot offer this androgynous possibility and satisfaction of the need for nurturance, as the plot fails to reach the point of discarding the fury, anger and stubbornness to reveal affection underneath. The lack of completion of the historical romantic plot, in fact, exposes one of the thematic traditions of lesbian literature, "that of unrequited longing of almost cosmic totality because the love object is denied not by circumstance or chance, but by necessity" (Zimmerman 91). It is upon this tradition that the contemporary plot is constructed, drawing from it for conflict, interest, intensity and humour. The play's major interest seems to lie in the deconstructive and self-referential comment on the possibilities of expressing a lesbian theme, a possibility of disrupting the heterosexual romantic representation.

3. The Question of Disruption

According to Jill Dolan, the only possibility for subversion and transgression in representation of homosexuality appears in pornography – in the visual and shocking representation of sexuality instead of the exploration of identity. All the other representations yield to dominant ideologies either

supporting the latent heterosexual norm or falling into invisibility. Representations of homosexual life-styles and identities are seen as "neutralizing assimilation into the dominant discourse on sexuality" (Dolan 264). Texts containing such representations are called assimilationist lesbian texts in which a mild disruption may occur in "'lesbianizing' the familiar" (265). If we follow this argument, we might consider the representation of sexuality and even lesbian identity in *Her Aching Heart* as highly assimilated into the heterosexual norm. There is only one moment that can be regarded as an on-stage representation of sexuality, or rather eroticism, which is conveyed through a convention of a dream:

> *They lie there. They both have a disturbing dream, or so it seems. The disturbing dream makes them toss and murmur and throw themselves into each other's arms.* [. . .] *They lie there. They pull each other closer and closer. They begin to toss from one side to another. They swap places*. (128)

The suggestion of lesbian eroticism in the play is thus detached from the representation of the fictional reality (which, we have to remember, is the embedded fictional reality within the play proper). This triple distancing certainly takes away the subversive potential from the scene. In other places, the moments of declaration of affection are presented with a dose of irony and humour which diminish both sentimentality and any potential provocation. For instance, in a verbal combat at the beginning of the play when the two characters fight over a fox, suddenly both express their fascination for each other:

> HARRIET. I will beat you until your rough holland gown is as thin as silk!
> MOLLY. I will bite you until your magnificent riding habit hangs in tatters and rags! And so will the fox.
> HARRIET. I will take you to my opulent bed and there on the fine satin sheets I will kiss your lips with such intention that I will kiss out your soul . . .
> MOLLY. I will take you to my truckle bed and there on the simple cotton sheet I will touch your body with such intention that I will bring forth your soul . . .
> HARRIET. What?
> MOLLY. What?
> *Surely they both misheard.*
> HARRIET. I misheard.
> MOLLY. I misheard. (97)

The direct expression of lesbian fascination is filtered through comedy and withdrawn by being relegated to misunderstanding. This impossibility to communicate non-heterosexual desire contributes to the central theme and organising principle of the play: the failure of expression of lesbian love and identity and the deferral of communication visible in attributing transgressive expression to dreams, nightmares, accidents and ultimately to a different text and

convention being quoted in the play proper, highly reliant, as we have already seen, on the heterosexual polarised structure.

The underlying heterosexual norm visible in the distinct polarity in the construction of characters could be connected with the convention of a butch-femme relationship. The relative acceptance of the butch/femme opposition in cultural representations weakens its potential for representation of lesbian identity as different from heterosexual polarities. According to Dolan, enacting butch-femme relationship on the stage through costume and role-playing focuses on identities which reaffirm heterosexual dichotomies (267). At the same time, however, the characters in the play both express their desire for the other, thus rejecting the polarity between the butch and the femme, in which the former stands as a taboo of "the desire for the other woman" while the latter aims "her desirability at the butch" (Case 43). Similarly, as far as the notion of the gaze is concerned, the play presents both characters as having access to the subject position; as Lizbeth Goodman argues: "[I]n the context of performance, [Harriet and Molly] alternate taking subject and object positions in relation to the gaze" (122). This might be seen as an attempt to find a quality of the female gaze that is alternative to the male gaze power position. Such an attempt is exposed in the context of the play's imbalance of the social and economic status of the two characters, in which it would be more than natural for Lady Harriet to take the dominant subject position in relation to Molly.

Jill Dolan's argument that "homosexuality's assertion of the same can hardly be accommodated in bourgeois realism, for example, which asserts moral and sexual bipolarity – right/wrong, good/bad, and male/female – and maintains heterosexual difference as its organizing principle" (267) seems to imply a need for a redefinition of lesbian theatre aesthetics. Referring to Dolan, Lizbeth Goodman suggests that in lesbian dramaturgy oppositional structures of conflict and difference, which form the essence of traditional theatre, are "not workable" (141). The proliferation of polarities in *Her Aching Heart* seems to maintain a typical oppositional structure characteristic of heterosexual drama. However, the minimalist plot of the contemporary story consisting of telephone conversations emphasises similarity, sameness, parallelism and connection. However, because of its relative lack of conflict, the play proper cannot function independently from the parodied heterosexual form of the embedded romance. In this sense, what Lavery's play presents is not an alternative identity to the norm but rather, as Elaine Aston argues, "lesbian defined as an act of appropriation" (103). Yet, the appropriation of the romantic and melodramatic heterosexual structure can be perceived as a strategy deflecting the tendency to merge homosocial and homoerotic aspects in women-to-women relationships (cf. Castle 535; Sedgwick 508). The polarity of relationships in the melodramatic structure cannot be subsumed into the general notion of female bonding as a continuum embracing

all aspects of relationships between women. It is ostensibly a homoerotic bonding. Thus, in its problematisation of the possibility of finding a proper dramaturgy for expressing a lesbian love story, *Her Aching Heart* uses the critical aspect of parody to go beyond the comment on the genre and examine the cultural construction of gender identity and the suppression of representation of the same sex love.

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Part Two

Reading Subversion and Transgression in Poetry

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Tolkien's *Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún*: Creative Drama or Scholarly Exercise?

Abstract: J. R. R. Tolkien's *Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún* consists of two long narrative poems on the major events of *Völsunga saga*, making use, where possible, of eddic sources as well as the saga, and accompanied by notes written by Tolkien himself, but edited and augmented by his son. The poems, written in eddic metres and consisting to a large extent of dialogue, are amenable to analysis in terms of Terry Gunnell's concept of dialogic eddic poetry as a form of drama; hence the use of the term "drama" in the paper's title. The first of the two poems partly fills the gap left by the lacuna in the Codex Regius, the manuscript in which the edda poems are mainly preserved, but with a much smaller number of stanzas than the 200–300 stanzas that Tolkien evidently believed the lost leaves contained (221), the reason for this apparently being that the smaller number of stanzas accords better with the overall structure of his poem. The book as a whole thus shows a tension between scholarly and creative impulses. Tolkien's treatment of his sources is considered in the context of his fondness for "creating depth" (identified by Shippey 272–81). Tolkien's exclusion from his poems of the figure of Áslaug, presented in *Völsunga saga* and its sequel, *Ragnars saga*, as the ancestress of a line of kings and the daughter of Sigurðr and Brynhildr, who nevertheless claim to have had chaste relations, leads to a discussion of the relations between these two and their equivalents in related narratives: the Faroese ballads of Sjúrður, the Middle High German *Nibelungenlied*, and the German-influenced Old Norse *Þiðreks saga*. The prominence of Sigurðr's horse in these various narratives in turn raises the question of whether the presentation of relations between Sigurðr and Brynhildr in Germanic and especially Scandinavian tradition may owe something to a distant memory of the Indo-European ritual associated with the installation of kings, in which, as indicated by M. L. West, the queen lay with the corpse of a stallion while verses were chanted encouraging it to impregnate her (414–19).

J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún*, edited by Christopher Tolkien, consists of two long poems entitled *Völsungakviða en nýja eða Sigurðarkviða en mesta* ("The New Lay of the Volsungs, or the Longest Lay of Sigurd") and *Guðrúnarkviða en nýja eða dráp Niflunga* ("The New Lay of Gudrún, or the Slaying of the Niflungs"). The poems are inspired by various monuments of Old Norse-Icelandic literature, most especially the Poetic Edda, a thirteenth-century collection of poems of varying date, some as old as the ninth century; and two thirteenth-century writings: the anonymous prose *Völsunga saga*, and the prose *Edda* of Snorri Sturluson (d. 1241). Tolkien's poems are composed in convincing modern English imitations of metrical forms found in

Old Norse eddic poetry. The form predominantly used by Tolkien is *fornyrðislag* ("old story metre"), the metre reflected in all the stanzas of both his poems, with the exception of three stanzas in *Völsungakviða en nýja*, which reflect the form known as *ljóðaháttr* ("chant-metre"). Tolkien's use of these two forms is illustrated below; the English terms "old story metre" and "chant-metre" are borrowed respectively from Tolkien himself (45) and from Phillpotts (*Edda and Saga* 40). Bold type is used in both quotations to show examples of alliteration, and in the right-hand quotation underlining is used in addition to bold type to illustrate Tolkien's recognition that, in *ljóðaháttr*, the alliteration in the third and sixth lines of the stanza is independent of the alliteration in the lines preceding them. The left-hand quotation (in *fornyrðislag*) has moreover been chosen to illustrate his recognition that, while consonants alliterate with themselves in Old Norse poetry, one vowel may alliterate with another, witness the third and fourth lines of the stanza:

fornyrðislag ("old story metre"):
Forth sprang the wolf
by **f**ear blinded
of **a**wful **e**yes
that **o**pened wide.
Gram was brandished,
gleaming handled,
hissing **h**urled aloft
at **h**asting beast. (172)

ljóðaháttr ("chant-metre"):
'Who a **f**oe lets **f**ree
is **f**ool indeed,
when he was **b**ane of **b**rother!
I a**l**one would be **l**ord
of **l**inkéd gold,
if my **w**ielded sword had **w**on it.' (114)

In this paper I am mainly concerned with the first of Tolkien's two poems, *Völsungakviða en nýja*, which brings together in more or less harmonious form the different versions of the story of Sigurðr and Brynhildr that are found in the three main sources specified above. I say "more or less" because Tolkien's poem, magnificent though it is, does to some extent reflect the difficulty of harmonizing the different versions of the story, as will be shown below. One reason for this difficulty, among others, is the fact that some eight leaves are missing from the principal manuscript of the Poetic Edda, the so-called Codex Regius (Gammel kongelig samling 2365 4to), dating from the second half of the thirteenth century. The result of this is that, in the Poetic Edda, a gap is left in the story of Sigurðr from the point at which he first meets Brynhildr up to the point at which the sons of Gjúki plot to kill him (Hollander 239–43; cf. Neckel 195, 198). The likely content of the missing leaves may be tentatively deduced from the prose of *Völsunga saga*, which is based on a fuller version of the Poetic Edda than that which survives. Tolkien himself believed that the missing leaves contained 200–300 stanzas (221), but rather surprisingly covers the relevant part of the story (in *Völsungakviða en nýja*) in only 125 stanzas (124–68). This is presumably because the relatively small number of stanzas is better suited to the

overall unity of Tolkien's poem than the relatively large one. In other words, the demands of the creative imagination seem to have taken precedence here over the demands of scholarship: Tolkien the creative writer has apparently reduced the number of stanzas that Tolkien the scholar believed were contained in the lacuna.

In using in my title the word "creative" to refer to these poems I have in mind the way in which Tolkien, while following his sources carefully and closely, nevertheless makes them very much his own, and with the word "drama" I am drawing attention to the fact that each of his two poems consists to a large extent of speeches taking the form of dialogue, thus reflecting the interplay of character in the manner of drama. I give below some tables illustrating by number and percentage the proportion in each poem of lines taken up with speeches spoken by the characters, and marked off by quotation marks in Tolkien's text:

Völsungakviða en nýja:	339 stanzas	=	2,720 lines, including	1,283	lines of speech (47%)
Guðrúnarkviða en nýja:	166 stanzas	=	1,336 lines, including	571	lines of speech (43%)
Both together:	505 stanzas		4,056 lines, including	1,854	lines of speech (46%)

(both poems are in *fornyrðislag* apart from 3 *ljóðaháttr* stanzas in *Völsungakviða en nýja*: 5.42–44)

I am mainly concerned here with *Völsungakviða en nýja*, as already indicated, and most especially with the part of it that covers the gap in the story left by the leaves missing from the Codex Regius. I would note, however, that both poems, with the speech passages they contain, are amenable to analysis in terms of Terry Gunnell's concept of dialogic eddic poetry as a form of drama, as advanced in his book *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia*. It is true that their proportions of speech passages are by no means as high as in eddic poems composed in *ljóðaháttr*, which consist almost exclusively of speeches and which form the main basis of Gunnell's argument, but there is no reason why eddic poems in *fornyrðislag* containing, like Tolkien's poems, "dialogue between identified fictional characters" should not be used in support of that argument, as one of Gunnell's reviewers has indicated (McKinnell 322). I cannot do justice to Gunnell's argument here, but would quote his translation of the questions sceptically raised by Andreas Heusler in his review of Phillpotts' *The Elder Edda*: "Is there any evidence of ritual plays having existed in pagan Scandinavia? Is it possible to say that the myths behind the poems dealing with the gods and heroes were based on such plays? Could such plays help to explain the artistic form of the poems?" (Gunnell 8n47). Gunnell's book is essentially a cautious answer in the affirmative to all three of these questions, and in the present context, where my space is limited, I cannot resist quoting the dust jacket of his book: "The probability is that the manuscripts of the Eddic poems contain

some of the earliest examples of popular drama in the vernacular in Europe, works which with little doubt have much earlier roots in dramatic pagan ritual."

I give below summaries of the relevant parts of *Völsunga saga* and Snorri's *Edda*, placed side by side in columns in such a way as to show the main similarities and differences between their two accounts. Reference may be made to the combined edition and translation of *Völsunga saga* by Finch (30–61); to Faulkes's translation of Snorri's *Edda* (*Edda* 102–03) and his edition of the relevant part of it (*Edda Skáldskaparmál* 47–48); to Örnólfur Thorsson's combined edition of *Völsunga saga* and *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* (101–05, 109–22, 148); and to Schlauch's translation of *Völsunga saga* and *Ragnars saga* (185–91,198–215, 251).

Part of *Völsunga saga* (c. 1250):

Sigurðr slays the dragon Fáfnir, takes its gold (on which there is a curse), and travels until he meets Brynhildr on a mountain; she has sworn never to marry a man who knows fear. They plight their troth, whereupon Sigurðr leaves, travelling now to the castle of Heimir, Brynhildr's foster-father. He finds Brynhildr there too and they renew their betrothal; he gives her a ring from the dragon's goldhoard. Sigurðr then leaves again, travelling this time to the castle of King Gjúki and his wife Grímhildr, who have three sons, Gunnarr, Högni, and Guttormr, and a daughter, Guðrún, who has been having prophetic dreams about a hawk, a stag and a wolf-cub. Sigurðr forgets Brynhildr after being given a magic potion to drink by Grímhildr, swears oaths of mutual loyalty with Gunnarr and Högni, and marries Guðrún. Gunnarr now seeks to woo Brynhildr, but cannot cross the barrier of fire surrounding her hall, either on his own horse, Goti, or on Sigurðr's horse, Grani. Sigurðr exchanges shapes with Gunnarr and, mounted on Grani, crosses the fire. He and Brynhildr (who believes him to be Gunnarr) sleep together for three nights with a drawn sword between them, and Sigurðr takes from her the ring from the dragon's hoard that he had given her earlier (at Heimir's), replacing it with another. He and Gunnarr resume their own shapes and Brynhildr, after entrusting her daughter by Sigurðr, Áslaug, to Heimir, marries Gunnarr. Sigurðr now remembers his betrothal to Brynhildr, but gives no sign. Later, when bathing with Brynhildr, Guðrún shows her that she, Guðrún, has the ring

Part of Snorri's prose *Edda* (before 1241):

Sigurðr slays the dragon Fáfnir, takes its gold (on which there is a curse), and travels until he meets Hildr (also known as Brynhildr) on a mountain. Sigurðr then visits King Gjúki and his wife Grímhildr, who have two sons, Gunnarr and Högni; two daughters, Guðrún and Guðný; and a stepson, Gothormr. Sigurðr marries Guðrún. Gunnarr and Högni swear oaths of brotherhood with him, and Gunnarr seeks to woo Brynhildr, who has sworn to marry no one but the man who can ride the flickering flame surrounding her hall. Gunnarr cannot do this on his own horse, Goti, but Sigurðr, after exchanging shapes and names with Gunnarr, succeeds, riding on Grani, who will move for no-one but Sigurðr. He and Brynhildr spend a night together with a drawn sword between them, and Sigurðr gives her a ring from the dragon's goldhoard, receiving another from her in return. Sigurðr and Gunnarr resume their own shapes [and Brynhildr marries Gunnarr]. Later, when bathing with Brynhildr, Guðrún makes plain to her that she, Brynhildr, is wearing the ring from the hoard won by Sigurðr from the dragon, thus revealing that it was Sigurðr and not Gunnarr who had entered the flame-encircled hall. Brynhildr urges Gunnarr and Högni to kill Sigurðr, and Gothormr (who is not bound by the oaths of brotherhood) eventually does so. Brynhildr then commits suicide. Later, after Guðrún's two further marriages and the deaths of her children by all three marriages have been related, mention is

from the hoard that was taken from Brynhildr by Sigurðr, thus revealing that it was he and not Gunnarr who had entered the fire-encircled hall. Brynhildr feels herself betrayed and perjured, as she had sworn to marry no-one but the man who could brave the fire. She urges Gunnarr to kill Sigurðr, implying misconduct with her by Sigurðr in the fire-encircled hall. Sigurðr is eventually slain by Guttormr (who is not bound by the oaths of loyalty), whereupon Brynhildr denies Sigurðr's misconduct and commits suicide. After Guðrún's two further marriages and the deaths of her children by all three marriages have been related, *Völsunga saga* is followed by a sequel, *Ragnars saga*, in which Áslaug, the daughter of Sigurðr and Brynhildr, first suffers the loss by death of Heimir, her foster-father, but later becomes the second wife of the saga's hero, Ragnarr loðbrók, and the great-grandmother by this marriage of Haraldr hárfagri, the first sole ruler of Norway.

made of a surviving daughter of Sigurðr, Áslaug, who was brought up by Heimir and from whom important lines are descended.

We may notice at least four differences between these two accounts. Firstly, Snorri's account shows doubt as to the name of the figure met by Sigurðr on the mountain, calling her Hildr as well as Brynhildr. Secondly, Snorri makes no mention of Sigurðr's visit to Heimir, with the result that the ring is treated differently in the two accounts, ending up on Guðrún's finger in *Völsunga saga* and on Brynhildr's in Snorri. Thirdly, in *Völsunga saga* Guttormr/Gothormr is a full brother of Gunnarr and Högni; in Snorri's account he is their stepbrother. Fourthly, in Snorri's account Áslaug, who in *Völsunga saga* is the daughter of Sigurðr and Brynhildr, is not mentioned until the end of the account, and is then said to be the daughter only of Sigurðr; the question of who her mother was is left open. These differences give some idea of the difficulties with which Tolkien must have been faced in seeking to give a unity to his poem. A particularly surprising feature of *Völsunga saga*'s account is that Sigurðr promptly leaves Brynhildr on each of the two occasions that he becomes betrothed to her: strange behaviour for a newly engaged man! This almost certainly indicates, as do the two names Hildr and Brynhildr in Snorri's account, that in early versions of the story, now lost, Sigurðr visited, and parted from, more than one woman, and that the author of *Völsunga saga* is here combining two women into one (cf. Andersson 83–84). *Völsunga saga* in particular raises the question of what exactly were the circumstances of Áslaug's conception. Was she conceived at the first meeting of Sigurðr and Brynhildr on the mountain, or at their second meeting at Heimir's castle, or at their third meeting

in the flame-encircled hall? If the third, how did they overcome the difficulty of the sword between them?

I shall now give a summary of the relevant part of Tolkien's poem, *Völsungakviða en nýja*:

> Sigurd slays the dragon Fáfnir and takes its gold (including a ring, on which there is a curse) and travels until he meets Brynhild on a mountain; she has promised to marry only "the World's chosen". They plight their troth, but Brynhild bids Sigurd depart until he has won honour and a kingdom. Gudrún, daughter of King Gjúki and Queen Grímhild and sister of Gunnar and Högni, dreams of a stag and a wolf. Sigurd arrives at Gjúki's court; Gunnar and Sigurd sing of former exploits; with the help of the Gjúkungs Sigurd avenges his father's death. Grímhild gives Sigurd a drink which, it only later emerges, causes him to forget Brynhild. Ódin foretells a royal marriage for Brynhild. Sigurd marries Gudrún and swears oaths of mutual loyalty with Gunnar and Högni. Gunnar now seeks to woo Brynhild, riding on his horse Goti, while Sigurd rides on Grani. Neither Goti nor Grani will carry Gunnar across the flame-barrier that surrounds Brynhild, but Sigurd, mounted on Grani after assuming Gunnar's likeness, succeeds in crossing it. Sigurd and Brynhild lie together with a naked sword between them, Brynhild believing him to be Gunnar, and Sigurd takes a ring from her finger, substituting the ring from the dragon's goldhoard. Gunnar then marries Brynhild. Sigurd now remembers his betrothal to Brynhild, but gives no sign of doing so. Bathing with Brynhild, Gudrún makes plain to her that she, Brynhild, is wearing the ring from the hoard won by Sigurd from the dragon, thus revealing that it was Sigurd and not Gunnar who had slept with her in the flame-encircled hall. Seeing herself as betrayed and perjured, Brynhild urges Gunnar to kill Sigurd, claiming that he betrayed Gunnar's trust when sleeping with her. Grímhild's son Gotthorm, who is not bound by oaths of loyalty to Sigurd, is prevailed upon to kill him, whereupon Brynhild denies Sigurd's misconduct and commits suicide. (*Guðrúnarkviða en nýja* then follows, covering what it presents as Gudrún's sole further marriage, to Atli, and her subsequent death by drowning). (99–180)

This summary seems to point to a tension in Tolkien between the demands of the creative imagination and those of scholarly accuracy. It is the creative impulse, surely, which prompts him to provide a reason for Sigurd leaving Brynhild after becoming betrothed to her (he must first win honour and a kingdom), and to tidy up the whole story by completely leaving out any mention of Áslaug. It seems to be the scholarly impulse, on the other hand, which makes him reluctant to emphasize the motif of the potion of forgetfulness, perhaps because of a sense that this is an interpolated motif, introduced to absolve the hero of blame (cf. Andersson 74–75; Tolkien 139–40, 154, 229), and which also leads him to follow the tradition, found in the eddic poem *Hyndluljóð* as well as in Snorri (see Tolkien 170, 239), that Gothormr was a stepbrother rather than a full brother of Gunnarr and Högni, thus leaving open the question of who was Gothormr's father. This resistance by Tolkien to a wholesale tidying up of loose ends is consistent with his notion of "depth," to which Tom Shippey has drawn attention. Shippey, indeed, discussed this notion of Tolkien's in relation to *Völsunga saga* in the second edition of his book, *The Road to Middle-Earth*,

published in 1992, long before *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún* was published. Shippey's remarks, which are remarkably prescient in relation to the poem now under discussion, may be quoted:

> Now this, I would suggest, is "depth" as Tolkien understood it: to repeat his words on *Sir Gawain*, the quality "which compensates for the inevitable flaws and imperfect adjustments that must appear, when plots, motives, symbols, are rehandled and pressed into the service of the changed minds of a later time". It is a quality which may exist in one text, but is produced by a complex of them. It is intensified by age, by loss, by reconstruction, by misunderstanding. A vital part of it is the sense that even the authors of texts like the *Völsunga* did not understand their own story, but were doing the best they could with it. And the charm of it, the sense of puzzlement, of a factual base, of a better and richer and truer story somewhere in the hinterland but never yet told, may in fact be created not by literary success but by literary failure. (276)

I would not accuse Tolkien of any serious "literary failure" in *Völsungakviða en nýja*, and I doubt if Shippey would either. I would agree, however, with Shippey that Tolkien "was attracted by the thought of deepening what he had written by presenting it from an unfamiliar or half-comprehending perspective" (280). Tolkien's presentation of Sigurd's forgetfulness and of Gothormr's parentage do indeed seem to be written from such a perspective. If, in reading his poem, we want answers to the question of why Sigurd appears to forget Brynhild and to the less important question of who was Gothormr's father, we have to go beyond the poem itself to its sources, to delve deeply into the "complex frame of tradition" (Shippey 276) that lies behind it. This quality of depth is one that Tolkien appears to have inherited from medieval writers, such as the authors of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Völsunga saga*, but is perhaps more consciously exploited in his case than in theirs.

In the published version of Tolkien's poems, most of the questions that they leave unanswered are in fact answered in commentaries written by Christopher Tolkien, partly on the basis of notes written by Tolkien himself. From these it is clear that there was one set of unanswered questions in Tolkien's sources, most especially *Völsunga saga*, with which he was not prepared to engage in his poem, namely the questions of when, where and how Áslaug, the daughter of Sigurðr and Brynhildr, was conceived. The function of Áslaug, as the Tolkiens note (232), and as the left-hand summary above indicates, is to link *Völsunga saga* to its sequel, *Ragnars saga*, where she becomes the second wife of Ragnarr loðbrók and ultimately, as a result, the great-grandmother of Haraldr hárfagri, so that Sigurðr and Brynhildr thus become the ancestors of the kings of Norway. According to Tolkien, the inclusion of Áslaug in *Völsunga saga* is "a fatal addition" to the saga, because it takes away from the dramatic effect of Brynhildr *lying* to Gunnarr when she implies to him that Sigurðr slept with her, an insinuation she later withdraws (243). If indeed she is telling the truth in

making this insinuation, then she is guilty of lying when she withdraws it, and so would Sigurðr be, since in *Völsunga saga* (see Finch 59) and also in Tolkien's poem (174–75), Sigurðr and Brynhildr each indicate, just before dying, that relations between them had been chaste. That Sigurðr and Brynhildr were both lying at this later stage would hardly make for an appropriate end to their tragedy. It was considerations of this kind that led Tolkien to leave the figure of Áslaug out of account altogether in his poem.

Völsunga saga gives no clear idea of the circumstances of Áslaug's conception, as we have seen, and the Poetic Edda is of no help in this respect, since the relevant part of it is lost. It is noteworthy, however, that in *Völsunga saga* and in Snorri's *Edda* Sigurðr's horse, Grani, is present with Sigurðr and Brynhildr in the flame-encircled hall, since it is on Grani's back that Sigurðr crosses the flame barrier. Also noteworthy is the fact that in one of the Faroese "Dvørgamoy" ("Dwarf-maiden") ballads, recorded in the nineteenth century but reflecting, according to de Vries, a relatively early version of the story of Sigurðr and Brynhildr (286–89), the hero, Sjúrður, after sleeping in a forest with a dwarf-maiden, Ása, and begetting a daughter by her, finds that his horse, Grani, is missing, whereupon Ása lends him a substitute horse, instructing him to send it back to her after leaving the forest, at which stage he will find Grani, as indeed happens. He later revisits the forest, only to find that Ása has died in childbirth and that their newly-born daughter is dead also; the ballad ends with him burying them (see Hammershaimb 92–100, 190–95; Djurhuus and Matras 283–94). The implication seems to be that, on Sjúrður's first visit, Ása, the figure corresponding to Brynhildr in this ballad, knows where the horse is, and is keeping it to herself for purposes of her own before returning it to its master. I would ask whether these various details reflect a memory of the Indo-European ritual known as *aśvamedha*, in which, as indicated most recently by West (414–19), the queen lay with the corpse of a stallion while verses were chanted encouraging it to impregnate her. This ritual, it should be noted, was associated with the installation of kings, and here it may be remembered that in *Ragnars saga* Áslaug, the daughter of Sigurðr and Brynhildr, becomes the great-grandmother of a dynasty of Norwegian kings.

In a monograph published as long ago as 1917, Johansson (115–16) identified four main characteristics of this ritual, known in Sanskrit as *aśvamedha*, or "horse sacrifice," as described in ancient Indian sources, as follows:

Firstly, the stallion that is chosen for the sacrifice is initially allowed to roam free for a year, guided by nobly-born youths. In some accounts the horse is hitched to a cart or chariot and takes part in a chariot race, and in some accounts also it is washed in a lake or river. The purpose of the roaming exercise, according to Johansson, is to bring fertility to the land by sympathetic magic.

This preliminary feature of the sacrifice led Johansson (115) to make a connection with Tacitus's account of the cult of the goddess Nerthus in chapter 40 of his *Germania* (AD 98), where the goddess travels around the countryside in a cart pulled by cows and is washed in a lake (cf. Puhvel 205); and also with the Roman October Festival at which the right-hand horse of the winning two-horse chariot in a race held on the Campus Martius was deemed sacred to Mars, and its head and tail were offered sacrificially in thanksgiving for the success of the harvest (Johansson 116–17, 123; cf. Puhvel 272).

Secondly, the sacrifice itself, according to Johansson, was also intended to induce fertility by magic (115–16). The king represents the fertility god symbolically, as does the stallion also, while the queen symbolizes the earth-goddess, or Mother Earth. The queen lies with the body of the stallion after it has been smothered to death and manipulates its generative organ in a manner suggestive of intercourse, to the accompaniment of obscene incantations uttered by those in attendance. This central part of the sacrifice, according to Johansson, confirms the bestowal of the god's procreative power on the earth and on human beings (116); and it was also this part of the sacrifice that led Schröder to make a connection with the twelfth-century account by Giraldus Cambrensis, in chapter 102 of his *Topographia Hiberniae*, of how, in Donegal, in the north of Ireland, the incoming king, declaring himself to be a horse, copulated with a mare in front of the assembled people (310–12). The mare was then sacrificed and dismembered, its meat was boiled, and a large barrel was filled with the broth. The naked king climbed into it and supped the broth, while gobbets of boiled meat were distributed among the spectators (cf. West 417–19).

Thirdly, among Johansson's four features of the sacrifice are such details as the bathing of the stallion, already mentioned, the boiling of its blood, and the cutting off of its tail, apparently for medicinal and purificatory purposes; and fourthly and finally, a marked feature of the sacrifice is the exchange of obscene, riddle-like questions and answers among those in attendance, notably between the priests and the women present at the ritual mating of queen and stallion.

It is these last three features of the sacrifice, the manipulation of the stallion's member, the cutting off of part of its body, and the exchange of riddling obscenities, that led Johansson to find its influence in the anonymous Old Icelandic *Völsa þáttr*, preserved in the late fourteenth-century *Flateyjarbók*, with its account of how the Christian king Óláfr Haraldsson witnesses members of the still pagan household of a remote farm in northern Norway passing from one to another the chopped-off phallus of a horse, and reciting while doing so more or less obscene verses relating to the procreative power of animals and humans (117–23). There is disagreement about some of the details of this account, but there is little doubt that it reflects a ritual associated with the fertility god Freyr, as Näsström has shown (129–31); and Steinsland, noting in

particular *Völsa þáttr*'s emphasis that King Ólafr Haraldsson is present in disguise at this performance and puts a stop to it, has seen it as reflecting a pre-Christian ritual marriage associated with kingship (631).

The writings of O'Flaherty and Puhvel, both religious historians, and Roberto Calasso's carefully documented novel *Ka*, bring to light three interesting possible connections between the *aśvamedha* ritual and the story of Sigurðr and Brynhildr (O'Flaherty 149–212; Puhvel 269–76; Calasso 127–53). Firstly, it appears that in the case of the *aśvamedha* there had to be water at the place of sacrifice, usually a pond or a pool (Calasso 129–30); the bathing of the stallion has already been mentioned. Chapter 13 of *Völsunga saga* tells how Sigurðr, well before he meets Brynhildr, chooses his horse Grani from the stud of King Hjálprekr on the advice of an old man with a beard, who turns out to be the god Óðinn (see Finch 22–24). They drive all the horses into the river Busiltjörn, and all make for the shore except one. Óðinn explains that this horse is a descendant of his own horse, Sleipnir, and Sigurðr names him Grani. What is interesting here is the name *Busiltjörn*, described as a river in the saga, though the second element in the name, *tjörn*, in fact means "tarn," "pond," or "pool" (the first element, *Busil-*, may be related to the verb *bysja* [past tense *busti*] "to gush"; see Heggstad, Hødnebø, and Simensen 69; cf. also 70, 439). It may be noted that *Völsunga saga* is the only one of Tolkien's sources (207) that presents Grani as descended from Sleipnir and associated specifically with Óðinn. This may reflect the tendency of the author of *Völsunga saga* to give walk-on appearances to Óðinn as a unifying motif, and does not exclude the possibility of Grani being associated with Freyr.

Secondly, the stallion used in the *aśvamedha* sacrifice was supposed to be a white horse, and, according to Hindu mythology, all white horses have red mouths, as a result of the creator god Prajāpati having his lips singed by the fire god Agni while he, Prajāpati, was in the form of a white horse (Calasso 130–31). Now the name *Grani*, as Finnur Jónsson notes, is not related to the adjective *grár* ("grey"), as might perhaps be expected, but rather to the feminine noun *grön*, meaning "upper or lower lip," and referring in the case of Grani to the pink lips of a white horse (200).

Thirdly, it appears that part of the *aśvamedha* sacrifice involved capturing wild animals and placing each of them in a circle of fire before releasing them (Calasso 140–41). A circle of fire of course plays a prominent part in the story of Sigurðr and Brynhildr.

Sacker has drawn attention to the horse symbolism in the seventh *âventiure* of the Middle High German epic poem, *Nibelungenlied* (c. 1200) (279; see de Boor 71–73; Hatto 60–61). Sacker sees the horses belonging to Sîvrit and Gunther, who correspond to the Sigurðr and Gunnarr of Norse tradition, as symbols not so much of fertility as of virility. He notes that on their arrival in

Islant, where Sîvrit will help Gunther to win Brünhilt (who corresponds to the Norse Brynhildr), Sîvrit leads Gunther's horse and does not lead his own horse until he has seen Gunther safely mounted on his. According to Sacker, this symbolizes, on the one hand, Gunther's dependence on Sîvrit, whose help he needs in winning Brünhilt, and, on the other, Sîvrit's dependence on Gunther, who has promised him, in return for his help, the hand in marriage of his sister, Kriemhilt, who corresponds to the Guðrún of Norse tradition. As far as I can discover, these horses in the *Nibelungenlied* are not named, whereas in Norse tradition, as we have seen, Grani and Goti are the names of the horses belonging to Sigurðr and Gunnarr respectively.

Andersson speaks of the "fluidity of the motif"of Sigurðr's acquisition of Grani in Norse tradition, noting that it differs from one version of the story to another (144). We have seen how it is handled in *Völsunga saga*, where Sigurðr obtains the horse from King Hjálprekr with Óðinn's help, well before he meets Brynhildr. It is handled altogether differently in the early to mid thirteenth-century *Þiðreks saga*, an anonymous prose work in Old Norse which contains mainly German narrative material, and which, according to Andersson, shares with the *Nibelungenlied* a lost source, **Brünhildenlied* (21–23), which also formed, indirectly, a source for *Völsunga saga*: indirectly, that is, by way of a poem now lost and originally contained in the missing leaves of the Codex Regius. In *Þiðreks saga* (Bertelsen 1: 313–19), Sigurðr's foster-father, the smith Mímir, after being foiled in an attempt to kill Sigurðr, seeks to make amends by offering him, among other things, the horse Grani, which belongs to Brynhildr. Sigurðr then breaks into Brynhildr's residence, meeting her now for the first time, and requests the horse. Brynhildr dispatches men to catch it, but they fail to do so, and Sigurðr is hospitably entertained that night. In the morning he goes out with twelve men who once more try in vain to subdue the horse. However, when Sigurðr takes the bit, the horse approaches voluntarily and submits to its new rider. Sigurðr then thanks Brynhildr for her hospitality and leaves. After later marrying Gunnarr's sister, Grímhildr (called Guðrún elsewhere in Norse tradition), Sigurðr assists Gunnarr in the wooing of Brynhildr (Bertelsen 2: 37–43; see below), but the horse plays no part in this later stage of the story.

The motif is handled differently again in the Faroese ballad "Regin smiður" ("Regin the smith," recorded in the nineteenth century; see Djurhuus and Matras ix-x), which like the "Dvørgamoy" ballads forms part of the Faroese ballad cycle relating to Sjúrður/Sigurðr, and which, like them, may reflect earlier stages in the development of the story of Sigurðr and Brynhildr than those reflected in *Völsunga saga* and Snorri's *Edda*. In this ballad Sjúrður obtains Grani as a result of following the advice of his mother Hjördís to choose the horse that does not shy away from his throwing a stone into a river. Here, as in *Völsunga saga*, he obtains the horse well before he meets Brynhild (Hammershaimb 8, 148-49; cf. Djurhuus and Matras 1–8, 34–40, 57–64, 86–91, 106–14, 140–45, 164–74, 191–96).

It is not just the motifs involving Grani that may be described as fluid in the traditions relating to Sigurðr and Brynhildr, however. The complex relations of Sigurðr, Guðrún, Gunnarr and Brynhildr, and their equivalents differ considerably from one text to another, and not only in the case, already illustrated, of *Völsunga saga* and Snorri's *Edda*. In the *Nibelungenlied* (*âventiure* 10), on the second night following the marriages of Sîvrit and Gunther to their respective wives Kriemhilt and Brünhilt, Sîvrit with Gunther's consent enters the latter's bedchamber, wearing a cloak of invisibility, and successfully quells the physical aggression with which Brünhilt had rejected her husband's advances on their wedding night. Sîvrit thus convinces her, since she believes him to be Gunther, of the latter's dominance over her. In subduing Brünhilt Sîvrit does not have intercourse with her, but takes from her a ring and a belt which he later passes on to his wife. Gunther meanwhile consummates his marriage with the ready consent of Brünhilt, whose physical strength is now greatly reduced (de Boor 111–18; Hatto 89–94). Much later, after Sîvrit and Gunther have had by their wives sons named, respectively and reciprocally, Gunther and Sîvrit (in *âventiure* 11; de Boor 122; Hatto 98), Sîvrit's wife Kriemhilt, arguing (in *âventiure* 14) with Brünhilt about the merits of their respective husbands, calls her a "kebse" ("concubine"), declares that it was Sîvrit who took her, Brünhilt's, virginity, and produces the ring and the belt as proof (de Boor 137–47; Hatto 111–18). The accusation leads eventually to Sîvrit's death (in *âventiure* 16) at the hands of Hagen, the equivalent of the Norse Högni, who is here presented as a vassal, rather than a brother, of Gunther's.

In *Þiðreks saga* Sigurðr, after acquiring Grani from Brynhildr (see above), marries Grímhildr (alias Guðrún) and proceeds to assist her brother, Gunnarr, in wooing Brynhildr. Brynhildr gives Sigurðr a cool reception on this, her second meeting with him, however, since it now emerges that, at their first meeting, Sigurðr and she had each promised to marry the other and no-one else. To Brynhildr Sigurðr justifies his marriage on the grounds that Grímhildr, his wife, is the sister of Gunnarr, with whom he has exchanged oaths of brotherly loyalty. Brynhildr reluctantly accepts Gunnarr as a husband, but on the first three nights after their wedding resists his attempts at consummation, overpowering him with physical violence. Sigurðr assures Gunnarr that the loss of her virginity will reduce her strength to that of a normal woman, and Gunnarr asks him to bring this about. Sigurðr exchanges clothes with Gunnarr, takes his place in the bridal bed, and takes Brynhildr's virginity. He exchanges rings with her and he and Gunnarr then resume their own clothes, no-one suspecting what has happened (Bertelsen 2: 37–43). When Brynhildr later claims Gunnarr as her first lover in an argument with Grímhildr about their respective statuses, Grímhildr contradicts her, saying that it was Sigurðr who took her (Brynhildr's) virginity, and produces as evidence the ring, which Brynhildr recognizes. This revelation eventually leads to the death of Sigurðr at the hands of Högni, who is here

presented as Gunnarr's half-brother (Bertelsen 2: 259–68; 1: 319–23). No child of this union of Sigurðr and Brynhildr is mentioned in *Þiðreks saga*.

We may now briefly summarize "Brynhildar táttur" ("the ballad of Brynhild"), another ballad in the Faroese ballad-cycle relating to Sjúrður and arguably reflecting, like others in the cycle, a relatively early stage or stages in the development of the story of Sigurðr and Brynhildr, albeit not recorded until the nineteenth century. Brynhildr has set her heart on Sjúrður because of his reputation as a hero, and seeks to attract him by dwelling in a hall surrounded by a flame-wall which only he can cross. Riding on Grani, he succeeds in crossing it, and he and Brynhild sleep together, begetting a daughter, Ásla (cf. Áslaug). Sjúrður now leaves, despite Brynhild's warning that Guðrun, the daughter of Júki and Grimhild, will trick him by magic into marrying her. Brynhild gives him a ring at their parting. Sjúrður visits King Buðli, Brynhild's father, to ask for her hand in marriage, but Buðli also foretells Sjúrður's marriage to Guðrun. Bemused by magic, Sjúrður's horse Grani now carries him to Júki's court, where Sjúrður drinks of a magic potion and, as a result, forgets Brynhild and marries Guðrun. Guðrun and Brynhild later meet while bathing in a river, and Guðrun shows Brynhild the ring, claiming to have triumphed over her in having received it as a gift from Sjúrður, who took Brynhild's virginity. Brynhild says that because of Guðrun's words Sjúrður must die, and retires to bed in a state of great distress. Sjúrður visits her, and at the sight of him Brynhild gives birth to Ásla. She at once gives orders for the child to be cast into the river, since she does not wish to see it. The child is then set afloat on the river, where it is borne away by the current. Sjúrður's death is eventually brought about by Júki's sons, Gunnar and Högni; it is not clear whether Gunnar is married to Brynhild in this version of the story. When Gunnar mounts Grani after Sjúrður's death, the horse makes no move until Sjúrður's body is placed on its back (Hammershaimb 16–36, 152–62; Djurhuus and Matras 8–22, 40–50, 64–76, 91–99, 114–27, 145–52, 174–82, 196–205).

We may recall, in conclusion, the extraordinary sequence of events in *Völsunga saga*: Sigurðr meets Brynhildr twice before he drinks the magic potion that makes him forget her, once on the mountain and once at Heimir's castle. On both occasions he vows to marry her and on both occasions, inexplicably, leaves her. He then marries Guðrún as a result of drinking the potion, and after Brynhildr has married Gunnarr he remembers his vows to Brynhildr, but does nothing. These events, for which the Poetic Eddic sources are largely lost, thanks to the lacuna in the Codex Regius, are reported somewhat differently in Snorri's *Edda*, as we have seen, and it is my belief that in medieval Iceland there was considerable doubt and uncertainty about the order and nature of the events in question, and about the reasons for Sigurðr's behaviour. The confused nature of the account in *Völsunga saga*, to which Tolkien has drawn attention (232, 241–45), and its discrepancies with the account in Snorri's *Edda* that we have noted, suggest to me that, at the turn of the twelfth to the thirteenth century, a number

of conflicting options were open to those seeking to transmit traditions of Sigurðr and Brynhildr, whether orally or in writing; and it was during the thirteenth century that *Völsunga saga* and Snorri's *Edda* were composed, and the Poetic Edda was codified, as we have seen; *Ragnars saga* also dates from this century. The general impression of a multiplicity of options to choose from and/or combine is by no means dispelled by a comparison of the Icelandic versions of the story with its German and Faroese versions, as I hope to have shown. The Faroese "Dvørgamoy" ballad further suggests to me that, when it was felt necessary to link traditions of Ragnarr loðbrók to those of Sigurðr and Brynhildr by making Áslaug, their daughter, Ragnarr's wife, and the ancestress of a line of kings, one of the options considered, and inspired by distant memories of the Indo-European horse sacrifice, was the idea that Áslaug was the fruit of a union of Brynhildr with the stallion Grani. This idea was almost certainly considered only to be rejected, partly on grounds of pudency and partly because of its fantastic nature, but if it can be accepted as having been a contributing factor, however minor, in the development of the story of Sigurðr and Brynhildr, we can say, firstly, that it would have solved one of Tolkien's problems in enabling him to include the figure of Áslaug in his poem without laying Sigurðr and Brynhildr open to the charge of lying when they maintain that relations between them were chaste; and secondly, that it could be used in support of Terry Gunnell's view, referred to above, that the edda poems had their origins in ritual.

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Transgressing the Normative in Edwin Morgan's "Message Clear"

Abstract: Edwin Morgan's poetics of the language-game can be seen as functionalised in many contexts: historical, cultural, social, political, and aesthetic. A genuine Scot, known for his subversive political and social views, Morgan often engages in linguistic transgressive play in order to undermine the presumptions of the mainstream discourse but also to question the veristic rules of poetry writing. Insisting on expressibility and recognising a grounded, limited subjectivity as all that is on offer in socially structured practice, Morgan works at and against frontiers of the possible, transgression of limits being integral to his forms of attention.

The paper attempts to analyse Morgan's concrete poem "Message Clear" which undermines cognitively privileged habits of observation, preferred value systems, and dominant cultural assumptions. The analysis focuses on the poem's "verbivocovisuality" (Joyce) and morphodynamics, which not only question the one-way linear flow between poet and reader but also point to the idea of "freeplay" (Derrida).

In his book-length study of Morgan's work, Colin Nicholson writes what follows: "[F]ascinated by the zany, the arcane, the absurd, the possible futures anciently set and possible pasts figured futuristically, social, personal, linguistic and cultural othernesses comes to us in the poetics of communicative rationality, which often operates through mind-bending syntax" (5). In Nicholson's view, Morgan is repeatedly searching for semantic frontiers where "centripetal pressure separates and centrifugal energy draws together" (5). It seems that Morgan's interest in exploring semantic boundaries is most visibly seen in his concrete and "emergent" poems whose morphodynamics point at indeterminacy of meaning.

This article is an attempt at analysing Morgan's visual, and to be more precise, visual concrete poem, in which the poet mobilises concern about the loss of the "epistemic anchoring" (Nicholson 6) and engages in the quest for the meaningful through the apparently meaningless, that is to say, by using the postmodern way of conceptualization he ventures into meditation upon the nature of language (including poetic language), sign and meaning. I am interested in the way the poem "Message Clear" presents itself as "verbivocovisual"[1] text. It is

[1] The term was coined by James Joyce in *Finnegans Wake* Book II Episode 3 (341.19), but in the 1950s it was appropriated by the Brazilian Concretists to evoke the synaesthetic character of their work, and, interestingly, "verbivocovisuality" is associated with concrete poetry ever since. To learn more on the international poetic inspirations, see Campos, Pignatari, and Campos; and McLuhan.

"visual" in that the constructivist scheme produces its own meanings but also brings out the material aspect of the word, its plasticity; "verbi," in that Morgan is always constructing new meanings, creates new connotations; and "voco" ("musical" or "sound"), which often consists in adding subsequent levels of meaning and which frequently introduces and/or strengthens poem's morphodynamics as Morgan tends to reify words in his concrete poems and in the rhythms of sound poems. He hears and transcribes words, and the readers are also to hear them in order to see them. I will focus on the way "Message Clear" contests the status of language as a bearer of uncontaminated meanings and how it questions the one-way linear flow between poet and reader which, as Marjorie Perloff observes, most visual writing today is preoccupied with (qtd. in Bohn 284).

For Jakobson, the so-called poetic function "projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination" (358). This definition confines poetry to what the Brazilian Concretists call the cycle of verse (Krysinski 131). Having internalised a theory of language as a structural system of signs, the concrete poem laboratory explores the projection of the paradigmatic axis into the syntagmatic axis (Portela 1). For Bohn, this characteristic points to a third crisis of the sign: "[V]iolating the traditional prohibition against semiotic incest, the linguistic sign was transformed into a visual sign" (22). It will be clearly seen in "Message Clear," particularly in the way the combination of graphs is viewed as images. Bohn states that if "'poetry is organized violence committed on ordinary speech' as Roman Jakobson maintains, then visual poetry is organized violence committed on ordinary poetry" (22). And concrete poetry in particular initiates the cycle of meta- and para-verse with respect to the "spatial and the iconic drive" (Krysinski 131). Hence, it seems evident that the well-known Jakobsonean definition of the poetic function does not help us understand the sense of the Concretist revolution that produced a completely new understanding of poetry (Krysinski 131). The visual poets were the first to recognise that poetry is inevitably seen as well as seen through. For the Concretists, Krysinski observes, the language of poetry is a curious symbiosis of the verbal, the visual, the iconic, the phonetic, and the vocal, and the message of poems is conveyed when all these elements coincide (131).

Manuel Portela notices that in retrospect, the poem appears as a script of meaning, even if this meaning is not predetermined. He adds that "despite their reliance on the ambiguity that results from superposition of sense and sound states, many concrete poems focus on language and print as technical devices for producing and exchanging information" (Portela 1). In his poem "Message Clear" (which can read "message received," "message checked," "message confirmed," or obviously "simple message"), Morgan does precisely this: he explores the limits of communicativeness and, by extending them, he "makes the message clear" to the skilful reader.

```
  am              i
                                  if
i am                          he
      he r          o
      h     ur   t
     the re           and
      he       re     and
      he re
  a                 n   d
     the r                   e
i am     r                     ife
                 i n
           s      ion and
i                        d      i e
  am   e res   ect
  am   e res   ection
                   o            f
     the                       life
                   o            f
   m   e            n
           sur e
     the                 d      i e
i          s
           s   e t    and
i am the   sur          d
  a  t   res     t
                   o          life
i am  he r                       e
i a             ct
i        r  u       n
i  m   e  e      t
i                t              i e
i          s     t    and
i am th            o      th
i am     r           a
i am the   su       n
i am the   s       on
i am the  e   rect on       e  if
i am     re         n     t
i am       s          a         fe
i am       s   e    n     t
i     he  e             d
i    t e   s     t
i        re           a d
  a  th  re           a d
  a        s     t on       e
  a  t   re           a d
  a  th  r         on       e
i        resurrect
                        a       life
i am              i n           life
i am     resurrection
i am the resurrection and
i am
i am the resurrection and the life (Morgan 159)
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Manuel Portela claims that

> concrete poetics moulds the structural and psychic materiality of the sign by linking its formal linguistic properties with the mind processing of those properties. Thus, it is a poetics of spoken and written language, as much as it is a poetics of hearing and reading. Its hermeneutics starts at the physiological processing of audiovisual input, which transmutes the poem into a cyborg, that is, a cybernetic simulation of meaning as a specific processing of information. (3)

In "Message Clear," the game of repetition and difference is spatialised on the page in such a way that it seems to foreground the fact that a text is a set of instructions for reading itself. At first glance, the poem seems to be chaotic, lacking structure, not to mention cohesive or lexical unity. Subsequent lines look like disorganised scenes open to the reader's response, as it is he/she who becomes the creator or scriptwriter. Having read the poem aloud, and this aspect of poetry has always been very dear to Morgan, one can easily notice that seemingly meaningless graphs make sense. Then the process of "collecting" a poem, or as Barthes would prefer to see it, the process of re-writing the poem can follow. This can be done in various ways, as each of the readers provides his/her own interpretative key to the poem.

In response to literature, one of the major principles that enable the reader to go beyond the information given in the text is what Culler calls the Rule of Significance. "The Rule of Significance" is, Culler suggests, the primary convention of literary competence: "[R]ead the poem as expressing a significant attitude to some problem concerning man and/or his relation to the universe" (115). The rule requires the reader to perform semantic and thematic transformations until he/she can read the poem in such a way. These transformations are subject to the constrains that shape and constrain the cognitive processes of abstraction and symbolisation (Tsur 43).

For Nicholson, "Message Clear," supposed to be a monologue spoken by Christ on the cross, reconstructs a gospel triangulation of word, beginning and godhead (see John 1.1) by going forth and multiplying spatialised forms for one of Jesus' utterances:

```
i am     r                    ife
                 i n
           s     ion and
i                      d     i e
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"The end effect," Nicholson continues, "is a poem that seems to assemble itself as it goes along, and a text that calls for active decipherment and reconstruction by the reader" (95). Watson suggests that "[i]t is as if we are witnessing some interrupted . . . communication, only gradually patching itself together. Perhaps

the sender is having difficulty; perhaps the receiver is faulty; perhaps the atmospheric conditions are unpropitious" (175).

It could be argued that "Message Clear," as a concrete poem, exemplifies a kind of language generator which provides a microcosm both of the linguistic processes of word and sentence creation and of the more basic and fundamental structuring processes of the phonetic, syntactical, semantic, and pragmatic elements that produce language (Portela 1). Language here would be seen as, above all, the possibility of expanding elements, classes, and combinations, and that is why it is to be pulled apart and scrutinised in its microscopic materiality. Hence "where the bits and bytes that produce verbal meaning have been decomposed," the poem presents us with "the machine-code for the miracle of transubstantiation that occurs in linguistic signs" (Portela 2–3). Such analysis signals concrete self-reference to the poem's information code.

For concrete aesthetics, the dynamics of a syntactical combination that resulted from phonetic and graphical attractions and lexical cross-breeding is the guiding principle of composition. In Morgan's poem, its workings may be observed at the lexical and morphological level (agglutinations, prefixes, infixes, suffixes, and various types of fragmentation of both lexemes, morphemes and even graphemes), but also at the higher level of syntactic units, sentences. These procedures subject the semantic and ideological level of language to a combinatorial art that simultaneously deconstructs and reconstructs the texture of inferences, recurrences and references which uphold this fluid, trickster-like discursive coherence.

The poem starts from a question: "am i," which is followed by a conditional structure: "if i am he / hero / hurt / there and / here and / here / and / there."[2] It may be read as the speaker's identity quest, and if we take into account the last line, which is a direct quote from the Gospel of John (11.25), we arrive at a comparison made by the speaker between him and Christ. The speaker supposes that he is hero, and that he is hurt, and this again refers us to the story of Christ, who was a hero and who was hurt "here and there." The following lines immerse us even more deeply in the context of the New Testament as the speaker speaks of Jesus: "i am rife / in / sion [read "zion"] and / i die /. . . . sure / the die / is / set and / i am / at rest /. . . . i am here / i act / i meet / i tie." The shuttered images reflect the story of Jesus coming to Zion to be claimed as hero and destroyer of the status quo ("i am rife / in / sion / . . . . / i am here / i act / i meet / i tie") and, later on, to be crucified because of that ("i die").

The lines that follow the reflection of the story of the Messiah refer us to Egyptian mythology. The speaker says: "i am thoth / i am ra / i am the sun / i am the son / i am the erect one." The figure of Ra, the Sun god, the godhead of the

[2] I have decided to render the quotation in the way I read it, by collecting the graphs, thus creating a scene. From now on I will consequently use this scheme.

Egyptian pantheon, appears here accompanied by Thoth, the one who was considered the heart and tongue of Ra as well as the means by which Ra's will was translated into speech. Just as Thoth has been likened to the Logos of Plato (and also to the Greek Hermes, the hero who was mentioned in the previous part of the poem), his presence in the poem extends the spatial and temporal imagery by adding a parallel between Christ and his father Jehovah and Thoth and Ra. In Egyptian mythology, Thoth played a vital and prominent role, being one of the two deities who stood on either side of Ra's boat (similarly to Christ standing on the side of his father after his resurrection). He was involved in arbitration, magic, writing, science, and the judging of the dead (again, a striking similarity to the figure of Christ). Both Christ and Thoth are the executers of the will of corresponding godheads. The speaker appears as a conflation of Thoth, Ra, the sun, and Christ, the son being the embodiment of God Jehovah and "the erect one." The lines that follow speak of his powers and mission: "i am sent / i heed / i test / i read / i thread," which may read as: I am sent to the human race in order to heed, to test and read the hearts of people. The speaker also mentions symbols of Christ, namely a stone (Christ is called the corner stone of a temple of God[3]), and a throne (as an attribute of power to rule the human race). The final seven lines consequently lead us towards the message of Christ: "i resurrect / a life / i am in life / i am resurrection / i am the resurrection and / i am / i am the resurrection and the life." He is a life (or alive), he is (the Being), he resurrects; hence he embodies the Gospel, the hope of all the believers. Apart from being an avatar of God, Christ in his human aspect (Jesus) may stand for each human individual. And if so, the question which appears at the beginning of the poem may now be read as: am I (do I exist, am I the Being, God) if I am him, the hero (Christ)? From this point of vantage, the word "if" causes even more relativity of meaning than it could have been assumed at the beginning of the analysis.

It seems that the craft with which Morgan composes his poem allows the readers to come up with their own connotations, parallels, "scenes," and "scripts," without imposing his own path to follow. "Message Clear," similarly to the Gospel ("good news") designed to be "clearly" understood by everyone, contains numerous mysteries to be discovered by the readers. One can freely choose one's own key to the poem, and still, thanks to its morphodynamics, "Message Clear" will remain open to new readings.

That brings me to the Derridean concept of language seen as a philosophy, or perhaps, a philosophy of living, that can be deconstructed, presented as a new

[3] In the Gospel of Luke we read: "But Jesus looked at them and said, 'What then is this that is written: 'The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner stone'?" (Luke 20.17); in the First Letter of Peter we read: "For this is contained in Scripture: 'Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, and he who believes in him will not be disappointed'" (1 Pet. 2.6). See also Eph. 2.20–22.

"freeplay." The idea of opening the reader to new perspectives of seeing the text and the reality (the reading of which, according to Derrida, is textual) seems essential. In his essay "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," Derrida states:

> Besides the tension of freeplay with history, there is also the tension of freeplay with presence. Freeplay is the disruption of presence. The presence of an element is always a signifying and substitutive reference inscribed in a system of differences and the movement of a chain. Freeplay is always an interplay of absence and presence, but if it is to be radically conceived, freeplay must be conceived of before the alternative of presence and absence; being must be conceived of as presence or absence beginning with the possibility of freeplay and not the other way around. (293)

Derrida claims that there are two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of freeplay:

> The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering, a truth or an origin which is free from freeplay and from the order of the sign, and lives like an exile the necessity of interpretation. The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms freeplay and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of ontotheology—in other words, through the history of all of his history—has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of the game.
>
> There are more than enough indications today to suggest we might perceive that these two interpretations of interpretation—which are absolutely irreconcilable even if we live them simultaneously and reconcile them in an obscure economy—together share the field which we call, in such a problematic fashion, the human sciences. (294)

He admits that it should be our aim to find a middle ground of these interpretations and thus to enjoy the freeplay. Morgan succeeds in enjoying the freeplay without indicating the fear of having lost something or without showing the intention of recovering something.

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Part Three

Reading Subversion and Transgression in Prose

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The Rite-of-Passage Structure in Medieval and Early Modern Visionary Accounts

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to apply Arnold van Gennep's and Victor Turner's conceptual scheme of the rite of passage to medieval and early modern visions of the hereafter. Most of the visionary accounts (e.g., *Drythelm's Vision*, *Thurkill's Vision*, *St. Patrick's Purgatory*) share a great deal of similar material. Usually these are stories about a man who is mysteriously taken to the otherworld during his deep sleep, trance, severe sickness or a similar state which, in Carol Zaleski's words, is called a near-death experience. Afterwards a visionary is brought back to tell his community about the things he saw. From such a composition, one can work out that visions, in most cases, have a threefold structure of *rites de passage*: separation (pre-liminal phase), transition (liminal or margin phase) and aggregation (post-liminal phase). A threshold (*limen*) stage between separation from one state and integration into another is a crucial one as it implicates not only transgression but also transformation of a visionary. The liminal phase is being regarded here as a point of entry and exit between zones of this experience. It also includes the suspension of social roles and, by definition, being "not in control." On his return, the visionary can be perceived by the community as a messenger or a prophet, depending on the circumstances.

In the introduction to one of his works, Arnold van Gennep encouraged his readers to apply and test his conceptual scheme of *rite de passage* to their own fields (xxv). In this paper, I am going to accept this invitation, as from the material gathered throughout the years by folklorists, theologians, historians of religion and literature,[1] one can work out a threefold structure in the medieval and early modern eschatological visions of the hereafter. These are stories about a man who is mysteriously taken beyond the world and afterwards he comes back to tell his family, relatives and neighbours about the things he saw in the otherworld. The visions, in most cases, have such a tri-phasic rite-of-passage structure: separation (pre-liminal phase), transition (liminal phase) and aggregation (post-liminal phase). As a matter of fact, in van Gennep's theory, the threshold (Latin *limen*) stage between separation from one state and integration into another, the liminal phase, is a crucial one, as it implies not only transgression but also transformation and metamorphosis, dying and rebirth,

[1] The scholarship on the visions is vast and the references are only a short catalogue of these works. To some of them this paper is partly indebted.

conversion and change.[2] It also includes the suspension of social roles and, by definition, being "not in control."

All these features may be found in Latin and vernacular versions of medieval and early modern eschatological visions performed as a journey ("nekyia") to the otherworld.[3] These narratives attempted to predict future eschatological events, prove one's holiness or sinfulness, deliver a message from God or a saint to the living, or describe the afterlife.[4] Although the apparitions of the otherworld took varied and complex forms, in general, the visions considered here have some traits in common as they share similar material, ideas and structure. Therefore, in order to apply van Gennep's and Turner's theories and present the most common pattern of those visions, I will point out "liminal" elements of their composition as the concept of "liminality" seems to be helpful in understanding the transitional character of the otherworld journeys.

Pre-liminal Phase: Separation

The so-called pre-liminal phase occurs in special or unusual circumstances. As a rule, a visionary experiences a vision when he is in an emotional or physical "crisis," i.e., fasting, starvation, dying, stress-related symptoms or other altered states of consciousness. Kroll and Bachrach suggest that some of these experiences are probable psychopathological states, as in

[2] In the words of Victor Turner, liminality is a place and a time "between and betwixt" (*Forest of Symbols* 93–111). The threshold is being regarded here as a point of entry and exit between zones of a visionary's experience. According to van Gennep, "rites of passage" accompany important changes in the life and development of an individual or society. In Turner's view, van Gennep and others have shown that "*rites de passage* are not confined to culturally defined life-crises but may accompany any change from one state to another" (*Forest of Symbols* 94–95). Kroll and Bachrach present a slightly different approach to the descriptions of visionary experiences as they focus on mental phenomena.

[3] As most visions share a lot of common material (Gardiner xiv), their content can be well epitomized in the vision of Barontus, which is both an exemplification and the quintessence of a typical account. Yitzhak Hen summarizes the vision as follows: "One morning while returning to his cell immediately after Matins, Barontus felt dizzy and lost consciousness for twenty-four hours, during which he was attacked by demons, rescued by the Angel Raphael, brought in front of St. Peter, and was given permission to continue his earthly life. Shortly after regaining consciousness, Barontus told his fellow monks what he had experienced during his visit to the other-world, and his story was recorded in what is now known as the Visio Baronti" (477). See Levison for the Latin text and Hillgarth for the English translation.

[4] Though the German scholar Peter Dinzelbacher claims in his studies on medieval visions that there is a difference between vision and revelation (when the elements of the supernatural appear in real life), one must remember that Latin terms *visio, somnium* and *revelatio* were used interchangeably.

the vision of Salvius: "One day as Salvius lay on his bed, gasping for breath and weakened by a high temperature, his cell was suddenly filled with a bright light and the walls seemed to shake" (Kroll and Bachrach 43; Gregory of Tours 386).

In most cases, a visionary's soul is separated from the body and taken to the otherworld during a deep sleep, dream, trance, short-term death, severe illness[5] or any other superconscious state, which Carol Zaleski calls a near-death experience (*Life*; *Otherworld*). Sometimes there is no separation as the entire body is taken to the other world (for example, in *St. Patrick's Purgatory*); however, in most cases the soul leaves the body and a visionary appears to be as if dead. On the other hand, he may appear half-alive as some signs of breathing or carnal warmth might still remain. For instance, when St. Julian arrives and takes Thurkill's soul to visit the other world, his body stays behind in his bed, rigid and motionless, scarcely breathing: "Let your body rest on the bed. It is only your spirit that is to go with me. So that your body does not appear to be dead, I will inspire the breath of life into you" (Gardiner 220).[6] Guibert of Nogent writes about his mother's vision in a similar vein: "One summer night . . . after she had stretched out on her narrow bench and had begun to sink into sleep, her soul seemed to leave her body without her losing her senses" (qtd. in Benton 93).

Who are visionaries? A brief preface to the text of a vision usually consists of information about life and social status of the visionary, for example: "There was a certain man of simple habits who was as hospitable as his humble means would allow. He lived in a town called Tunsted in the diocese of London" (Gardiner 219), or

> [w]hile Sigebert still governed the kingdom there came from Ireland a holy man named Furseus, renowned both for his words and actions remarkable for exceptional virtues, for he wanted to live as a stranger for our Lord wherever an opportunity should offer itself. (Gardiner 51)

As a rule, no special qualification is needed to be granted a vision of the other world, neither sanctity, nor age, nor learning, nor membership of any particular estate (Schmidt 50). Indeed, anybody, even the godless, could be granted experiences of the world beyond for the benefit of himself and the others. Thus, there are visions experienced by holy or good men (Furseus,

[5] Nevertheless, it may happen that some of these states coincided.

[6] I refer to Gardiner for the English versions of the visions. The volume contains English translations of twelve visions of the hereafter and is especially helpful for comparison between texts and for finding their structural similarities. The brief but competent introduction is useful in researching visionary accounts of the otherworld. See Botterill for a review of Gardiner's work.

Drythelm), monks (Wetti, Monk of Melrose, Monk of Evesham, Barontus), knights (Owen, Tundale, George of Hungary), peasants (Thurkill, Gottschalk), poor women (*mulier paupercula*) or youngsters (Orm, Alberic).[7]

Liminal Phase: Rite de Marge

A visionary, now with the soul separated from his body, is situated "between and betwixt." The liminal phase of the otherworld journey starts here. None of the visionaries chooses this state voluntarily, but they are granted with this experience by force. It means that a visionary is engaged with a vision unexpectedly and surprisingly, like Piotr Pęgowski of Mazosz, the protagonist of an early Polish vision, taken by force to heaven (albeit in his body). The introduction to this *visio* consists of the details of his capture. On the fourth day of March, on Tuesday, while coming back from Poznań via Kalisz, he stayed overnight at an inn. After supper, he agreed with his servant to leave early in the morning the next day and went upstairs to his bedroom. After praying to the almighty God, he got to sleep. But suddenly a very strong wind, with heavy rain and thunder, took the man and he disappeared for three days. When his servant woke up the next morning and noticed Pęgowski's absence, he set on the journey back home on his own presuming that his master had left earlier (Sokolski, *Straszliwe widzenie*).

Vulnerability, helplessness, insecurity and the loss of one's identity are typical of the transition within the liminal phase of the rites of passage when a visionary is, by definition, "not in control." For instance, when Tundale's soul left his body, being aware of the sins committed, he grew terrified and he did not know what he might do. He feared something, but he did not know what he feared. This is why spiritual directors and counselors are often sought in times of transition. The visionary needs outward support and encouragement to endure liminal space so he is provided with a guide ("psychopompos"). A psychopompos may be the guardian angel, a saint, an indeterminate ghost or a person wearing a white robe. This is how Drythelm describes his guide: "He who led me had a shining countenance and a bright garment, and we went on silently toward, I thought the place where the sun rises on the solstice" (Gardiner 58). The psychopompos is responsible for conducting a soul from place to place, informing about things he sees and explaining the meaning of the journey:

[7] Research by Kroll and Bachrach indicates that visions were experienced by a saintly person (not segregated by gender – 15% of visions they examined), male (royal, secular rank or bishop – 20%), unnamed male or without rank (40%), woman of rank (7%) and without rank (9%) (43).

> I began to think that this perhaps might be hell, whose intolerable flames I had often heard discussed. My guide, who went before me, answered my thought saying: "Do not believe it, for this is not the hell you imagine." (Gardiner 58)

Not only in Orm's account but also in *Visio Sancti Pauli* (*St. Paul's Vision*)[8] it is Archangel Michael who serves as a guide: when St. Paul was in prison, Archangel Michael took him up to the Lord and showed him earth, heaven and hell. Paul saw many people sunk in the stream of fire. Then Paul cried and asked the angel who those people were. The angel answered that these were those who had committed fraud, theft, debauchery; they had not attended church and had not done penance. The way of presenting the state of the damned by a set of statements describing the torments, their causes and consequences are known in rhetoric as *explanationes demonstrativi*.

The guide also serves as a protector, preventing a soul from being hurt by the demons encountered in hell or healing the soul after it has been wounded (Gardiner xvi). For instance, a hermit revived from death and testified that he had been to hell where he saw several powerful men dangling in fire. Just as he too was being dragged into the flames, an angel in a shining garment came to his rescue and sent him back to life with the words echoed in several medieval visions: "[L]eave, and consider carefully how you will live from now on" (Zaleski, *Otherworld* 76). A psychopompos as a spirit-guide leading or escorting souls in the otherworld is a genuine liminal figure. Belonging to the hereafter, he has knowledge reaching far beyond the otherworld. The psychopompos as a usual element of the visionary's experience has his origin in the Book of the Watchers, a part of the famous Books of Enoch dating back to the third century BC, where angel Uriel and other archangels accompany Enoch in his apocalyptic journey (Sokolski, *Pielgrzymi* 49).

During the journey, which in fact is an out-of-body experience, a visionary (*recte* his soul) accompanied by the guide, visits the otherworld and can see the torments of hell and purgatory or joys of heaven, encounters demons and even experiences some tortures. Usually visionaries in the course of their visions are led to watch the torments of hell first and joys of heavens afterwards, as the sequence of places visited has some psychological meaning. For instance, the first place of punishment to which a monk of Evesham is brought by his guide, St. Nicolas, is a marsh of hard mud where sinners of both sexes are undergoing torment (Dod 253). These torments are usually of physical, or rather sensory

[8] *Visio Sancti Pauli* is one of the most popular apocryphal writings, widespread all over Europe from early medieval times. It was probably based on the biblical quotation from Paul's second letter to Corinthians: "I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago – whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows – such a man was caught up to the third heaven" (2 Cor. 12.2). The vision influenced further development of eschatological imagination and is considered as one of the sources of Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

nature, as the souls are tormented by demons in freezing-cold ice or immense fire according to the sins committed. The monk of Evesham reports the unbearable punishment of the souls in a dramatic way:

> Endless were the kinds of punishment which I saw; some were roasted before fire, others were fried in pans, red hot nails were driven to their bones. . . . I saw those wretched beings destroyed by a hundred or more different kinds of torture. . . . The side of the mountain overhanging one part of the lake sent forth fire to the heavens; on the opposite promontory of the same hill there was such an intense cold caused by snow, hail and raging storm that I thought I had never before seen anything more torturing than the cold at that place. (Dante 433–34)

In some visions, the souls are grouped together, as in more elaborate works there are separate places and torments for each type of sin, like in Tundale's or Thurkill's visions:

> Blessed Julian conducted him altogether unhurt through the fire to the lake; and the two then walked together on the road that led from the church through the middle of the flames. No wood supplied the fuel for this fire, but the sort of flame seen in a fiercely-heated oven rose and was diffused over the whole space. It consumed the black and spotted spirits for either a shorter or longer period, according to the degree of their crimes. The spirits who had escaped the fire descended into that cold salty lake . . . Some of these were immersed over the head, some up to the neck, some to the chest and arms, others up to the navel, some up to the knees. . . . (Gardiner 222)

The aim of presenting these torments to a visionary during his journey through hell is not only to overwhelm him. Occasionally the protagonist of a vision, for example Tundale, experiences some of those tortures in order to be illuminated on their qualities and features, and to experience a kind of purgation, as liminality is a phase of transition and transformation. In the course of this experience, a visionary gains some knowledge and is able to inform his friends, neighbours and relatives on his return about the reality and nature of hellish punishment.

Next, a visionary ascends to heaven, where he sees eternal joys of the blessed. Heaven is usually presented as a splendid city with houses and palaces made of precious stones and diamonds or a spacious garden full of delicacies. Heaven as a *locus amoenus* is presented to a visionary as a real place of safety and abundance that can be earned through a virtuous life, a place to be desired. This is a site of profusion that compensates the lack of economy and social privileges on the earth, and where little ones can find justice.

We are dealing primarily with visual experience in all the cases. The visions use forms such as "I saw," "I spotted," "I noticed," "I watched," "I observed." Both lay people and clergymen who were the addressees of visionary accounts wondered about sensual delights and displeasures of the otherworld. Using this

kind of stylistics justified the genuine experience of the protagonist, who was not only the narrator (in the most cases) but also an "eye-witness" of the joys and torments in the hereafter. Special emphasis in these works is also often put on the visionary's experience of the hereafter through his other senses, such as smell, hearing and even taste. Drythelm says:

> After standing there a long time in fear, not knowing what to do, I heard behind me the noise of a most hideous and wretched lamentation, and at the same time a loud laughing, like that of rude multitude insulting captured enemies. I observed a gang of evil spirits. (Gardiner 59)

But when Drythelm enters heaven, he can smell the fragrant odour, see the bright light and hear the sound of sweet singing. It shows that a vision, even though in most cases experienced beyond the visionary's body, is presented as a totally physical experience. As far as visions of the blessed are concerned, the heavenly sight is an augmentation of the ordinary vision where a soul with high spatial acuity is able not only to move from one place to another but also to admire bright colours of heaven, see through the opaque objects, and thus fully enjoy the bliss of heaven.

Post-liminal Phase: Aggregation

As the middle one in the threefold structure, the liminal phase depends not only on the pre- but also on the post-liminal phase. That is why the aggregation or, in other words, the return of a visionary to life and reality is so important in this three-phase composition. A visionary, having walked through liminality and coming out the other side, is different forever. By his *communitas*, he is considered to have undergone a change and become someone different from what he used to be before. When relatives try to give Thurkill some water by force on Sunday evening, he suddenly comes to and speaks the word *Benedicite*, which he had never done before, and tells his relatives and the village priest of the revelations which were granted to him during his two-day trance.

Having been brought to life, a visionary, usually previously a sinner, traumatized with this experience, changes his life, and often undergoes a profound alteration as enlightenment, illumination and purgation of a visionary are the main purposes of a vision. As Gardiner points out, the protagonist is in many cases threatened with the torments that he will suffer if he does not amend his life when he is returned to his body (xx). The result of the vision is often a remarkable conversion, which is, after all, the primary characteristic of religious experience. Consequently, visionaries sell their possessions, give all their belongings and property to the poor, join monasteries, set off on a pilgrimage, travel to Jerusalem and then spend the remainder of their days in penance,

poverty and prayer (Gardiner xxiii). Drythelm concludes his journey in the following way: "I am now truly risen from death, where I was held, and permitted again to live among people, but not as I used to; I am to live in a very different manner from before" (Gardiner 57). In effect, after distributing his wealth among the poor, he joined the monastery and spent the rest of his life in meditation in a private dwelling and "his life declared that he had seen many things either to be dread or desired" (Gardiner 57).

Visionaries may also take up preaching the Gospel or retire as hermits. Stephen, for example, confessed to Gregory the Great that he had never believed the stories about hell and punishment but that his brief visit to the infernal court had changed his mind:

> The angel . . . spoke to him in this manner: "Go back again, and from now on look carefully after yourself and how you lead your life." After these words his body grew warm little by little. Waking out of this sleep of everlasting death, he reported all those things that happened around him. Then he devoted himself to such fasting and vigils that although he said nothing, his very life and conversion still spoke of the torments that he had seen and still feared. (Gardiner 47)

But what we are dealing here with is not only a religious experience of an individual. Repentance and reformation are expected from those whom a visionary knows or is about to meet on his return. The visionary acts as a messenger and an informer, and tells his family, neighbours and local community what he has seen in order to change their lives and bring them to moral conversion. Encouraged by a visionary, they all are supposed to benefit from his experience. However, sometimes a visionary is supposed to refrain from informing the others what he saw during his otherworld journey or is banned from reporting his experience. This, for instance, happens to Orm. Usually quasi-heretic information, like *apokatastasis* or *refrigerium* (cf. *St. Peter's Apocalypse*), was subject to such a *prohibitio*. However, the protagonist is normally instructed by his guide on what he is expected to do and say after returning to life.

In an attempt to express himself and to convince his audience that he had actually had a vision and had not just been sleeping for a few days, the visionary has to rely on the words that would come to mind, words that made sense to his listeners. Obviously there is a gap between a vision itself and its narration by a visionary who has to describe a deeply religious experience that may not actually be describable in words (Zaleski, *Otherworld* 190; Gardiner xxv).[9] On the other hand, however, some of the protagonists can prove their journey and convince their audience about the existence of the otherworld by actual signs.

[9] I am concerned here mainly with the structure of visions and not with a vision as a literary genre.

For instance, Furseus proves *per experimentum* that he suffered actual physical punishment by bringing back the scars of torture experienced in his vision:

> When he was restored to his body, and throughout his whole life, on his shoulder and jaw he bore the mark of the fire that he had felt in his soul, visible to all men. In an amazing way his flesh publicly showed what the soul had suffered in private. (Gardiner 55)

Such evidence may help with conversion and leads to a better moral existence.

The threefold structure is present in most literary visions and resembles that of the *rite de passage* where the liminal phase is vital for the pilgrim's conversion. On the other hand, liminality should not be considered uncritically. I am aware that eschatological visions sometimes do not respect perfectly the idea of liminality and *communitas* as presented by van Gennep and Turner. However, I have tried to show the benefits of applying this anthropological method to the analysis of descriptions of visionary experiences from medieval and early modern writings.

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Damsels and Demons: Transgressive Females from Clarissa to Carmilla

Abstract: Stories featuring female vampires transgress moral boundaries and subvert the cultural allocation of gender. The purpose of this paper is to look at the first Victorian example of such a story, "Carmilla" by J. S. Le Fanu, and see its ambiguous presentation of female characters and sexuality from the perspective of the literary delineation of women in the early eighteenth-century and later gothic novels, thus demonstrating their continuity in the depiction of both female subjugation and self-assertion, but also inadequacy of gender distinctiveness. Defoe's and Richardson's novels feature strong, assertive women who subvert moral, class and gender codes. Their "unfeminine" resourcefulness, obduracy and determination to follow their own will clash with patriarchal expectations of subservience and ultimately lead to their victimisation. Distressed, but not defeated, these characters anticipate the arrival of gothic "damsels in distress" who move in a world similarly populated by villains who similarly prevail and transgress conventional representations of gender. "Carmilla" likewise features controlled female characters juxtaposed with the empowered ones. The strength and twist of the story lie in the presentation of women who, bowing to patriarchy, deceive and subvert its solidity by acknowledging female sexuality and demonstrating its endurance, permeating the crust of Victorian male respectability.

Biologically impossible, morally offensive and aesthetically dichotomous, vampires epitomise transgression. They are life and death; repulsion and magnetic attraction in one. Over the past two centuries they have permeated western art: literature, film, iconography. Originating in folklore, appropriated by both high and popular art, they have re-entered collective consciousness, constituting one of the most potent myths in western culture (Janion 7–9). Because their survival depends on close physical contact, reading vampires is also to read the most personal human relations, such as that of parent and child, often interpreted through Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalysis, or adult erotic relations of various configurations, which, in the last decades, feminist and gender studies have made their domain. Because of their notorious transgression of moral boundaries, tampering with taboo, class consciousness and gender certainties, vampire stories are rich ground for exploration of social, cultural, psychological and ethical issues. Though creeping into collective English consciousness gradually from the beginning of the nineteenth century

with Polidori and Byron, they grabbed popular attention in Victorian times, especially with *Varney the Vampire* and, later, with Le Fanu's "Carmilla" and Stoker's *Dracula*.

This paper proposes that the presentation of female literary vampires and their victims is better understood if situated in relation to the role of female characters in the English novel from its critically acknowledged launch at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The presentation of female characters reflects the social and cultural positioning of gender which, despite the considerable span of time encompassing these novels, is change-resistant: the authorial management of female characters always, and often unknowingly, splinters the solid orthodoxy of gender dualism and stages a clash between a female character and her imposed familial, social and economic conditions. To a large extent, female presence in the male-dominated canonical English novel of the eighteenth century is both a continued story of repression and subjugation and a hopeless cry for self-assertion. The portrayal of female characters in these novels is often echoed in the representation of women in gothic novels, and this reverberates in a transmuted form in Victorian vampire stories. This paper explores factors that shaped female characters before the arrival of vampires and that, in metamorphosed form, produced what is only seemingly a contradiction in terms, that is, a demonic damsel, a transgressor, a female vampire.

In many eighteenth-century novels, women are either relegated to the background where they simply do not matter in the all-for-men world of adventure and exploration, as in *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719), or become a muted, yet favourably beautiful, presence in the background, as in Smollett's picaresques. But when they do come further forward, they can be sharply depicted characters who subvert expected subjugation and powerlessness by vigorously marking their presence in the patriarchal web, yet not effectively undermining it. The early stages of the English novel abound in fascinating representations of strong, level-headed heroines who demonstrate that this new-fangled genre is the artistic locus to expose the crudity and inadequacy of imposed gender distinction.

In his first novelistic attempts, Daniel Defoe demonstrates that single women are damsels in distress in the harsh reality of the early eighteenth century. The eponymous heroine of *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders* (1722) soon discovers that without the financial shield of her family and her father's purse, she needs a male protector to stay alive. Marriage is the best solution and offers lasting stability, so with the demise of her bread-winning husband, she must look for another male sponsor. However, the world in which Defoe's female protagonists move is paved not by "real men," gentlemen-protectors, but by life-draining, unsupportive villains, ill

advisors, unscrupulous creditors, dishonest debtors, egoistic suitors, unfaithful and irresponsible lovers. In procession these men come and go, dying or dumping their women, leaving them prey to the urban jungle. The women can either conform to patriarchal streaming and wither, waiting passively for protection, or transgress the boundaries of their sex and take on the male roles of initiators, suitors, trades(wo)men, investors. Operating within the constraints of a patriarchal, pre-industrial, pre-Pill world, Defoe's women refuse to be victims. Labelled as bad unfeeling mothers who abandon their children and as incontinently passionate lovers, they refuse to conform and strip off their damsels' corsets, yet seldom achieving wholly untrammelled independence in the process. Sexually liberated, they select their partners and, tainted by hard lessons, drain, if not their men's blood yet, then certainly their purses.

Moll Flanders relates the end of her first loveless marriage of convenience, in a crude, matter-of-fact way: "It concerns the story in hand very little to enter into the further particulars of the family . . . only to observe that I had two children by him, and that at the end of five years he died" (Defoe, *Moll Flanders* 63). She quickly discovers that "marriages were . . . the consequence of politic schemes for forming interests, and carrying on business" and that "money only made a woman agreeable" (72–73). Whenever possible, both Moll and Roxana in Defoe's 1724 novel choose husbands who are rich, abandon those who turn out to be impoverished and resort to theft and prostitution in order to survive when they happen to be on their own. For her disintegrated morality, Moll Flanders is branded by her own author in the Preface as anti-hero, not an exemplar to follow (2). A transgressor of conventional boundaries of gender and respectability, she is associated with "folly and wickedness," and "levity and looseness" (3), features acceptable in men only, as opposed to the classically feminine virtues of penitence and inner beauty that she lacks. It is no accident that Daniel Defoe chooses a male, Robinson Crusoe, to illustrate the precepts of a good Christian life and hard-earned conversion. His "wickedness" is never bodily; Robinson remains a sexual embryo throughout the major part of the narrative. Unlike those of his female counterparts, his urges throughout the two-decade stay on the island are never sexual. It seems that just as the death of a beautiful woman is the most poetic subject, moral degeneration is similarly best illustrated with the use of a female body. It must be remembered that the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are still an era when "religion and literature were primary and interdependent vehicles of apprehension" (Auerbach 219). A female sinner is more abhorrent, especially when sinning involves the management of her own body.

Richardson's heroines are likewise equipped with emotional endurance and determination to have their own way, all within the limits of their inferior social

position. *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740–41) begins with the Preface by the Editor, in which he declares that the purpose of the work is to "improve the Minds of the Youth of both Sexes. . . . to inculcate Religion and Morality. . . . to give practical examples" (*Pamela* 3). Similarly, *Clarissa: or The History of a Young Lady* (1748–49) offers a character who is declared to be "an exemplar to her sex" (Richardson, *Clarissa* 1: xiv). Richardson's heroines are not morally transgressive the way Defoe's women are. On the contrary, sex is out of the question for each of them, therefore in the end they each get their reward. There is much more inwardness in Richardson's epistolary narratives, self-preoccupation and pinpoint presentation of fluctuation of emotions. In both these novels psychological and sociological acuity is intriguing. The first part of *Pamela* depicts the eponymous character's entrapment by her puritan upbringing which clashes with her awakening sexuality; her book-fed expectations of encounter with a gentle-man conflict with the reality offered by a vulgar libertine. Pamela's first meetings with Mr B are loaded with conflicting emotion and gender and class concerns. "Who would have you otherwise, you foolish slut," "D–n you! . . . for a little Witch; I have no Patience with you," is what Pamela gets from him (40). Is Mr B, Justice of the Peace, not a transgressor of decorum and propriety here? These streams of invective manifest his frustration at being unable to discipline and possess his double inferior: a servant and a woman. Pamela cannot resort to the same vulgarity: she may not swear to her master as a housemaid. But she can use the weapons of her innate sensitivity and innocence, and, above these, her intellect. Whenever Mr B offends her, she stands up for herself. In this respect, in the promiscuous reality of Richardson's aristocratic villains, Pamela (and later Clarissa) is a transgressive character: she dares to oppose his libertine expectations of female subservience. In their verbal clashes, her inferior, conventionally-belittled femininity wins, founded on the only available resources of reason and logic. Whenever he resorts to emotion and loses his temper in an "unmanly" fashion, she summons her "manly" intellect and erudition, and disables him.

Pamela earned volleys of criticism for celebrating a cunning hypocrite who cleverly engineers her master plan. Condemnation came mainly from male readers, Fielding among them (Watt). But perhaps Pamela should be read as another instance of an undefeated, though distressed, survivor. Even though she is designed to epitomise orthodox femininity, she is more than mere victimised passivity. Left at the mercy of her master – her own father's support no more than a couple of inflated letters and impractical maxims – she is literally trapped on Mr B's estate and later imprisoned in his country house. The elements of imprisonment – seclusion and the presence of a villain – leave us only a step

away from the gothic underworld. Yet, in a pre-gothic way, Pamela wins the heart of her villain, thus securing her own future by his aristocratic side.

Clarissa paves the way towards gothic novels' enactment of female social disability even more solidly. Though gothic imagery and blood-and-bone paraphernalia are missing, all the other gothic ingredients are at play here: property, unwanted marriage, enslavement and a villain. Clarissa subverts patriarchal hierarchy and refuses to be a hushed, submissive daughter when, driven by jealousy over her inherited property, the family want to punish her by imposing marriage to a paragon of stupidity, Mr Solmes. As a consequence, she is disciplined, imprisoned by the father and labelled mad by the mother. Her escape with Lovelace, who treats her according to his libertine maxims: "[I]f once subdued, be always subdued" (*Clarissa* 2: 41), is a plunge into enslavement and rape. The story is an exemplar of excess: excessive emotional torture, prolonged imprisonment and criminal acts by the family and Lovelace leave Clarissa with no choice but an excessive solution. She refuses to be defeated and determines to stage her own death, a rite of passage which remains the only sphere of her life where she can have control. Clarissa is the first literary example of an ambiguous blend of angelic purity in a fallen body and opens the way for a Victorian relishing of the pure and the fallen combined, later taken up in new ways by the vampire genre. Apart from an un-feminine obduracy and lack of subservience, also manifested in her triumphant procession to death, Clarissa transgresses femininity in one more way, namely, in her yearning to depart from a conventional marriage-bound existence. All she wants is to be left alone, to live unaccompanied in the property inherited from her grandfather. But this desire, viewed in the moral light of the novel, is merely meant to enhance her saintly righteousness and chastity, a fact sharpened by her hysterical fear of sex channelled into a truly horror gothic dream.

Distressed but not defeated, Clarissa is a clear antecedent of the heroines of gothic fiction, where a victimised yet victorious pageant of female characters prevails. Ann Radcliffe's romances and Mattew G. Lewis's only novel, *The Monk* (1796), are all populated by male villains, ineffective or absent fathers, vaporous lovers, and heroines who have to move through architectural and social labyrinths. This pattern has its congruencies with the early eighteenth-century novels mentioned above, though circumstances and imagery change. Sedgwick notes that gothic fiction classically presents "an individual fictional 'self' . . . massively blocked off from something to which it ought normally to have access" (12). In both pre-gothic and gothic fiction it is always the female character who is exposed to the malignity of being "blocked off" and deprived.

However, what is new at this stage of the genre's development is the introduction of otherness in the form of foreign unfamiliarity, an alien factor that

had not appeared with such intensity in the English novel before. Radcliffe and Lewis take their readers to continental Catholic countries, where monasteries with their monks, nuns and abbots, long gone in Britain, are so alien to the average English reader that unprecedented violence and supernatural mystery slip in with ease. Unfamiliarity and strangeness of ritual feed into unparalleled cruelty and hypocrisy, and an English phobia of both Catholicism and revolution (Whitlark). Sedgwick proposes that all gothic novels work "within a narrow set of conventions narrowly defined" (11). Thus we see the same choreography repeated later by Mary Shelley in *Frankenstein* (1818), John Polidori in "The Vampyre" (1819) and in Victorian vampire stories, such as "Carmilla" and *Dracula*; they all replicate the pattern of evil implemented or conducted on the Continent, always instigated by the alien Other.

Miall suggests that Radcliffe's novels "play out the implications of the regressive, semi-childlike state which was enforced on women by the prevailing culture" and that they "capture the borderline status of women, neither child, nor adult." This infantilisation of heroines is connected with a denial of their sexuality and is a pattern also found in exemplary characters of earlier fiction: the fifteen-year-old Pamela, who stays chaste until her wedding day, Clarissa and her vision of single adulthood or Sophia Western in Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749) enact the same scenario. Gothic women: Isabella and Matilda in Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Radcliffe's Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and Ellena in *The Italian* (1797), are also all strong and undefeated, yet infantilisation and asexuality are inscribed in their social being. As becomes real damsels, they stay virginal throughout.

Yet, women survivors in these novels do not conform to the mould of the submissive female. Both *Pamela* and *Clarissa* are "truly extraordinary tributes to female intelligence and articulateness," and Richardson makes his heroines display features transgressing the traditional ideals of their sex's subordination, although in both cases this period of subversive behaviour lasts as long as they are "single and oppressed" (Beasley 37). Similarly in gothic fiction, Walpole's Isabella, Radcliffe's Emily and Ellena or Lewis's Agnes and Matilda are all undefeated and persevering. None of these novels, however, closes with final subversion of the imposed patriarchal domestic ideology. In the end, each in her own way, these women bend to patriarchal orthodoxy: Pamela by becoming a compliant wife, successful in the moral reformation of her husband and Clarissa by succumbing to the authority of the heavenly Father. Richardson's both novels end with "the heroine's total submission" which "marks the end of all stresses and conflicts, as equilibrium at last prevails" (Beasley 37). Gothic heroines marry their sweethearts, marking the end of the transgressive rule of the gothic underworld which provoked them to rail against the norms of femininity. Once

villainy is ruled out, order is restored. But is it patriarchal order? At this point arises also a question that goes beyond the authorial management of these texts and norms they profess. Namely, will these undefeated damsels in gothic novels ever fully return to subjection and succumb to the will of their ineffective "effeminate" men?

What female gothic texts certainly do is explicitly transgress conventional gender representations, as illustrated especially in the depiction of Ellena and Vivaldi in *The Italian,* or of Victor Frankenstein. Ellis speaks of the "considerable economic power of Radcliffian women" (123), which certainly also pertains to Clarissa and her insistence on keeping her grandfather's inheritance. Much has been said about the way Shelley looks at the problems of "cultural orthodoxy of masculinity" and how, by representing a "male hysteric," she shows that "despite a culture's artificial division of emotions by gender, the male body can, if need be, speak in a 'feminine' voice" (Hobbs 156). Earlier than Shelley, Radcliffe illustrated the same problem by sketching the conflict between reason and emotion. In crucial scenes in *The Italian,* Vivaldi is the one governed by passion, whereas Ellena becomes the "embodiment of fortitude, stoic calm, and patience, virtues associated with rational self-control" (Kelly 59), an opposition which has been touched on in Richardson's novel half a century before.

As suggested at the beginning of this essay, all the features of female characters from the early realistic and the later gothic stage of the novel analysed above merge to produce a female vampire: an unnatural blend of contradictory traits generating ambiguous, often polarised, emotions and revealing anxieties under the sugary coating of respectability. To an unprecedented extent in Victorian times, notorious for their moral rigidity and glorification of familial respectability, vampire stories feature in profusion, becoming a locus for expression of the era's repressions.

Like gothic novels, Le Fanu's "Carmilla" (1872) and Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) reveal anxieties connected with the Other. Victorian ghost stories are characterised by "the domestication of gothic figures, spaces and themes" (Punter and Byron 26). Though domestic elements – recognisable topography of one's own bedroom – and contemporary times feature in vampire tales, Le Fanu and Stoker still draw on overtly alien geography associated with the vampire who is an alien, a foreigner, or a woman, or a foreign woman. The source of evil is thus safely distanced from the nucleus of patriarchy, the domestic hearth and propriety personified by an English-man. In this respect, Carmilla effectively becomes an amalgam of two in one: a woman and a foreigner, who additionally appears in the company of "a hideous black woman, with a sort of coloured turban on her head" (Le Fanu 257), a virgin who died prematurely and after death became a lecherous seducer, an epitome of wistful femininity and

conventionally masculine forcefulness. Seen from the perspective of the previously analysed novels, Carmilla-the-vampire is a kaleidoscope of strong, self-assertive femininity, melancholic helplessness, infantile innocence, virginity and whorish licence. There is also a matrix of recognisable male figures at play in Le Fanu's story: as in gothic novels, male protectiveness proves a myth and masculinity falters when most needed. Just as Valancourt in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Vivaldi in *The Italian*, and Victor in *Frankenstein* fail, so do men in "Carmilla" and *Dracula* fail as guards, giving way for evil to creep in.

Additionally, while Laura, Carmilla's victim, epitomises the ideals of a woman to a puritan mind, female vampires enact Victorian male anxieties about femininity. On a social level, the Victorian era is the beginning of the legal emancipation of women, visible in the struggles for universal suffrage and equality in divorce and property rights. The image of a powerful, clever, enduring woman, here additionally clustered in authoritative sisterhood, embodies a threat to "existing patriarchal kinship structures" (Signorotti). On a more personal level, in their dichotomous nature and ambiguous reactions, vampire women embody both the angelic purity a man would want to keep at home and a fantasy female, a whore he dreams about but dares not touch, a transgressor of everything Victorian domestic respectability stood for. As Auerbach notices, they are exaggerated versions of other fallen angels: Clarissa, Tess or Hetty Sorrell (150–68). In this sense, with the exception of Clarissa, they are a product of Victorian times when painting, literature and numerous philanthropic undertakings demonstrated sensitivity to the fate of the fallen woman, thus largely contributing to the creation of yet another potent myth (Auerbach 150–68).

In this Victorian myth, "a woman's fall ends in death" (Auerbach 155). She is usually depicted as "a mute, enigmatic icon," her sexual practices, the reason for her fall, take place off stage, or are merely hinted at, and she is coloured or dressed aptly for her status as victim (Auerbach 155). Her death elevates her. Killing a victimised woman makes one a murderer and a criminal whereas she becomes a martyr. In vampire stories, the murder of a sinful woman makes the killer a hero, a saviour and a restorer of stability. And it is always a man, a specialist, who possesses the know-how: a sharp stake is driven through the heart of the vampire to the sounds of her piercing shriek; she is decapitated, the remains then burnt and the ashes scattered.

In Le Fanu's "Carmilla," Laura and Bertha, the General's niece, are examples of fully controlled, disempowered women, practically enslaved in remote schlosses by their male guardians. Laura's papa always adopts a superior tone in conversations with her or Carmilla. He acts as the sole possessor of knowledge and guards Laura's access to it by giving her information pertaining to her health, the visitors, in small doses (Signorotti). Her world is spun by male

specialists: doctors, priests and, later on, experts on vampires. The only figure of female authority is Carmilla's alleged mother, who subverts the conventional, patriarchal pattern enacted in both Laura's and Bertha's household. She is an empowered woman, surrounded by male servants, and can bring both Laura's father and the General to a bow, according to her design. She enters into the "big boys' game" and, introducing herself as a Countess, she uses their readiness to venerate a figure of authority and to perform as chivalrous protector for a woman in need. She dupes both of them easily, and by doing so, she remains intact (Signorotti).

"Carmilla" transgresses social conventions in one more way: homoeroticism. The lesbian magnetism between the women is, however, of a highly ambiguous nature. The "vampire's polymorphous sexuality" (Gelder 69) in "Carmilla" and later in *Dracula* is largely fostered by the subjective first person narrative technique: Laura's accounts of Carmilla's lesbian practices are never verified and take the form of innocent whispers and nudges during the day. The only account of night activities comes from a retold story of General Spielsdorf, who enters his niece's bedroom to discover "a large black object, very ill-defined" crawl at the foot of the bed and then "swiftly spread itself up to the poor girl's throat, where it swelled, in a moment, into a great, palpitating mass" (Le Fanu 311), the shape of which is far from phallic. Laura's eroticism may be a projection of her repressed awakening sexuality but it also combines a girlish longing for a friend, a sister, a mother, so often stressed throughout the story.

Carmilla is executed by a congregation of exclusively male figures, a vignette, as Signorotti observes, repeated by Stoker's "Crew of Light." The gentlemen's actions, however, are futile, even if they end with the demise of "the fiend." The story closes with Laura admitting: "[T]o this hour the image of Carmilla returns to memory with ambiguous alternations . . . and often from a reverie I have started, fancying I heard the light step of Carmilla at the drawing room door" (Le Fanu 319). One of Carmilla's executioners proclaims that her victims "almost invariably, in the grave, develop into vampires" (318). Carmilla has whispered to Laura: "[Y]ou in your turn will draw near to others, and learn the rupture of that cruelty, which yet is love" (263). The extermination of one of them is but a one-day victory. Carmilla is killed but the myth prevails and rears up in other vampire stories: in *Dracula*, for example, and in so many film adaptations that it is even in the bloodstream of those unfamiliar with the literary originals.

Vampirism was in nineteenth-century fiction a crevice which allowed writers to comment on the otherwise socially condemned female objection to subjugation, most notoriously enacted by means of sexual liberation. Because of

their associations with unbridled sexuality female vampires were by definition transgressive creatures. But it seems that reading female vampires as literary constructs has interesting implications when they are read as a continuation – if in a subversive form – of a tradition initiated by the fathers of the English novel and enriched by female gothic writers and authors of vampire stories. Using different vehicles, these writers seem to have gone along the same trajectory of representation of female social frustration, and agency thwarted by expected immobility. However, whereas the writes of female gothic novels, such as Ann Radcliffe or Charlotte Brontë, in the end offer what Hoeveler has termed as "gothic feminism," or "female-created fantasy" whereby a blameless heroine "triumphs over the patriarchy by creating alternative companionate family, marrying a 'feminised' man" (7), male writers offer no such reward for their either virtuous or promiscuous heroines. Female non-conformers in their novels analysed above either convert (Moll Flanders), conform (Pamela), end up living in an emotional void (Laura), or else retain their integrity by staging a hyperbolic escape from patriarchal corruption – their own death. Literary subversion does not always manoeuvre in novel and unexpected ways but perhaps by acknowledging transgressive undercurrents, it paves the way for representing subversion of constructions of established power in the future.

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The Discourse of Orientalism in C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*

Abstract: It has been stated, on the basis of certain motifs in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, that "like many Englishmen of his era, Lewis was unconsciously but regrettably unsympathetic to things and people Middle Eastern" (Ford 363). My task in this article would be to examine the nature of this prejudice because I generally agree that we can legitimately talk about C. S. Lewis's prejudice against Oriental cultures. The crucial problem seems to be whether this prejudice was so serious and so strong that it should in turn prejudice us, not only perhaps against what Lewis had to say about the Oriental cultures, but maybe even against this author himself. Naturally, Lewis's "anti-Orientalism" is hardly subversive in relation to his own cultural background, but it would be hard to deny that it is subversive in relation to the currently dominant discourse of multiculturalism. The material for the discussion is provided, for the most part, by the thread of Calormen, a fantastic country (appearing only occasionally in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, mainly in *The Horse and His Boy*) that shares many characteristics with a certain stereotypical conception of the Oriental civilization. But also some other books by C. S. Lewis, notably his essays, are taken into account. Some reference is also made to the famous book by Edward Said, *Orientalism*.

1

When talking about Orientalism, I basically follow E. W. Said's perception of the Western way of seeing the Orient as the Other, the Other being understood in largely negative terms, though at the same time a source of fascination. This is what Said seems to have had in mind when he talked, in the same breath, about "Oriental despotism, Oriental splendor, cruelty, sensuality" (1993). Thus, it might seem that the concept of Orientalism, while being essentially conservative, in the literal sense, as it helps to conserve the traditional identity of the West, conceived of largely in contrast with the East, or Orient, is also subversive, first of all, but not only, in the sense that it subverts itself, containing elements that cannot be easily harmonized with each other. Neither is C. S. Lewis's Orientalism in *The Chronicles of Narnia* a simple phenomenon, though it may seem simple to many not very attentive readers.

It is clear enough that the problem of Orientalism in Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* essentially boils down to the thread of Calormen, a fantastic country shown mainly in the part of the cycle entitled *The Horse and His Boy*,

represented as lying to the south of Narnia and separated from it by a broad belt of sandy desert and also by a borderland region called Archenland, which, unlike Calormen, is usually friendly towards Narnia. It is exactly Calormen that has been endowed with certain stereotype features traditionally associated with the Western perception of the East, or rather the Middle East. The inhabitants of Calormen are thus presented as a southern race, but also vaguely Oriental. David C. Downing refers to Andrew Blake's opinion according to which "Lewis's Calormenes [are] an unkind parody of Arabs, [and] the Narnia books contribute to the contemporary 'demonization of Islam'" (159).

As Downing correctly observes, Lewis's Calormen cannot be regarded as, strictly speaking, a representation of an Islamic culture because it is patently polytheistic,[1] but the Calormenes, nevertheless, "resemble Arabs in many respects" (159). This conclusion is no doubt suggested by the descriptions of the Calormenes' dress (turbans, shoes turned up at the toe), weapons (curving scimitars), racial type (dark faces), customs (frequent and elaborate haggling), titles (Grand Vizier), currency (the so-called crescents) and, first of all, by their manner of speaking, which is usually very formal and ornamental, full of set phrases (like "may he live for ever" when referring to the ruler of Calormen called the Tisroc) and florid quotations, possibly spurious, from unidentified poets. All of this seems to dovetail with a set of popular stereotypes about the Arabic or Oriental (possibly also Turkish, or Persian) reality, even though it is no doubt highly disputable to what extent those stereotypes correspond to any historical reality.

The above-mentioned quotations are highly sententious, platitudinous and didactic, although the morality they seem to propagate is servile, opportunistic and down-to-earth. For example, when the protagonist of *The Horse and His Boy*, Shasta, asks his Calormen foster father about "what is there beyond the hill," the answer he is given is apparently a quotation from "one of the poets": "Application to business is the root of prosperity, but those who ask questions that do not concern them are steering the ship of folly towards the rock of indigence" (12–13). Other examples are: "Natural affection is stronger than soup and offspring more precious than carbuncles" (15), "He who attempts to deceive the judicious is already baring his own back for the scourge" (121), "[T]he departure of guests makes a wound that is easily healed in the heart of a judicious host" (121), or "[D]eep draughts from the fountain of reason are desirable in order to extinguish the fire of youthful love" (122). If we accept the simple definition of poetry provided by Chris Baldick in his *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*: "Poetry is valued for combining pleasures of sound with freshness of ideas, whether these be solemn or comical" (173), then

[1] Naturally, as is well known, also the Arabs, and other Islamic nations, were usually polytheistic before they adopted Islam.

the Calormen "poetry" may be described as anti-poetry, as it offers neither "the pleasures of sound" nor "freshness of ideas," only rather sanctimonious solemnity, and the only poetical devices it uses are well-worn metaphors. At the same time, this kind of poetry shows clear signs of belonging to the respectable genre of proverb and parable.

In his discussion of Arabic literature, Józef Bielawski suggests that collections and anthologies of parables and fables became particularly popular at the epoch in the history of Arabic literature which he calls the times of lethargy and torpor ("letarg i martwota") that apparently characterize that literature in the period extending over three centuries: the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth (cf. 349–50). In his references to Calormen poetry, C. S. Lewis is no doubt recalling the experience of reading *The Arabian Nights*, where the characters occasionally quote apophthegmatic and didactic poetry, or simply make use of proverbs, which is only natural in popular literature to which *The Arabian Nights* belongs, even though it is true that this undoubtedly brilliant work was composed and became widely known at the beginning of the above-mentioned period of "torpor and lethargy." The characters in *The Arabian Nights* do of course many other things besides quoting ancient, or not so ancient, proverbs; they show such virtues as courage, endurance, altruism and hospitality, while the Calormenes are interested only in oppressing, exploiting, deceiving and enslaving, which is something that only negative characters in *The Arabian Nights* have a liking for. Besides, the poetry quoted in *The Arabian Nights* is not all composed of maxims and parables. Sometimes it concerns, for example, female beauty, and even if it is sententious, the sentences are not usually similar to Calormene proverbs, that is, they are not normally based on a servile and cynical morality. For instance, the first piece of poetry quoted by the wise woman Shahrazad at the very beginning of *The Arabian Nights* is indeed a proverb, but it attempts to give hope to those who have fallen into despair by saying that time not only takes away joy, but also human worries (17).

The point is that the southern Calormen serves in Lewis's books as a counterpoint to the northern Narnia. The former is shown as essentially a land of slaves and slave owners, that is, of people who are either abjectly subservient or intolerably haughty; in fact, they often are both subservient towards their social superiors and haughty in relation to their inferiors (if there are any), whereas the latter, i.e., Narnia, is represented as the land of the free, of people who know their own value and manage to preserve their dignity in relation to their social superiors, while avoiding riding roughshod over the feelings of their inferiors. Also the poetry of Narnia is contrasted with that of Calormen: "[T]heir poetry is not, like ours, full of choice apophthegms and useful maxims, but is all of love and war" (Lewis, *Horse* 129). In other words, the poetry of Calormen is that of morbid stability, while that of Narnia stands for the change, movement and risk-

taking associated with the notions of love and war. The freedom of Narnia is of course hardly appreciated in Calormen. As Tisroc, the ruler of Calormen, puts it: "These little barbarian countries that call themselves *free* (which is as much as to say, idle, disordered, and unprofitable) are hateful to the gods and to all persons of discernment" (124). Freedom then, in the eyes of the slavery-loving Calormenes, is synonymous with chaos and disorder, but we are meant to understand that this "chaos and disorder" represents life, while the Calormene order and profitability is mechanical, and, in the long run, deadly and inhuman.

2

It is remarkable, in this context, that the most important representative of Calormen in *The Horse and His Boy* is a teenage upper-class girl called Aravis, who, on the whole, is a highly likeable and respectable character. She certainly may be counted among the most interesting female characters created by C. S. Lewis. Let us say immediately that what makes her interesting in the first place is her rather obviously androgynous nature. Aravis's androgyny is a result of her rejection of "pure femininity" symbolized by her highly unreliable friend Lasaraleen, who is contrasted with Aravis in much the same way as Calormen is contrasted with Narnia. Lasaraleen is basically an embodiment of all negative stereotypes connected with traditionally conceived femininity. She is extremely snobbish and egoistic, but also lazy and cowardly. She is completely absorbed in trivialities connected with all kinds of self-indulgence and mindful only of her social status. In the story, we see Lasaraleen, first of all, as a person who cannot understand Aravis's motivation for escaping from her family home where she is being forced to marry a man whom she hates and despises. What matters for Lasaraleen is only the fact that this man is rich and highly-placed in the Calormen society so he can guarantee various creature comforts, such as bathing in ass milk, for his prospective wife. Thus, her understanding of marriage is utterly cynical, but also subservient; she has nothing against being bossed about by her family or by her husband as long as this is compensated by material bonuses. Lasaraleen represents Calormen at its worst, but also, I am afraid, at its most typical, while Aravis is a highly paradoxical creature and, above all, she is a very good product of a very bad society.

Her "goodness" is closely related to her having embraced the chivalric and heroic values associated with masculine aspects of the traditional Western feudal culture. It is of course rather difficult for her, as a girl, even though she is a princess, to aspire to a chivalric ideal. Female knights were very exceptional creatures in the medieval and Renaissance tradition, although one of Lewis's favourite Renaissance books, Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, contains

the character of female knight called Britomart. Britomart is originally a Greek nymph, or goddess, closely connected with the virgin hunter Artemis, perhaps an aspect of Artemis, whom the Romans called Diana. In Spenser, however, she appears as a British figure of power, as suggested by the entirely false etymology of her name, which originally seems to have meant "good maiden,"[2] and is not connected with Britain. Spenser clearly suggests that his Britomart is another embodiment of the Fairy Queen, and of the Queen Elizabeth I. Britomart, incidentally, resembles Aravis in that she also escapes from the house of her father, but her motivation is different. Instead of desiring to avoid an unwanted marriage, she rather wants to find a man whom she loves, even though she never met him and only saw his reflection in a mysterious mirror, a little like Tennyson's Lady of Shalott.

We learn the story of Aravis mainly from her own account included in chapter three of *The Horse and His Boy*:

> Now it came to pass that my father's wife, my stepmother, hated me, and the sun appeared dark in her eyes as long as I lived in my father's house. And so she persuaded my father to promise me in marriage to Ahoshta Tarkaan. Now this Ahoshta is of base birth, though in these latter years he has won the favour of the Tisroc (may he live for ever) by flattery and evil counsels, and is now made a Tarkaan and the lord of many cities and is likely to be chosen as the Grand Vizier when the present Grand Vizier dies. Moreover he is at least sixty years old and has a hump on his back and his face resembles that of an ape. Nevertheless my father, because of the wealth and power of this Ahoshta, and being persuaded by his wife, sent messengers offering me in marriage, and the offer was favourably accepted and Ahoshta sent word that he would marry me this very year at the time of high summer. (46–47)

This sounds a little like the story of Cinderella: the young heroine is persecuted by a wicked stepmother. However, the heroine's social status is too high for her to be treated like a Cinderella; hence she is being forced to marry a rich and powerful man, but, at the same time, someone who, in most respects, is very unlike the prince charming with whom Cinderella falls in love and who, eventually, becomes her husband. The social context of the story seems purely patriarchal. In spite of her high birth, Aravis is treated like an object and never even asked if she has anything against marrying Ahoshta. At the same time, the whole situation is clearly organized and masterminded by the formidable stepmother, who manages to gain almost total control over her husband. Admittedly, she can pull off this apparently anti-patriarchal feat only because of her husband's rather pliant and docile nature. Hen-pecked husbands are quite common in the patriarchal world (making it of course a little less patriarchal),

[2] This is the meaning of the name Britomartis provided in Robert Graves's *The Greek Myths* (2: 384). I am not a Greek scholar but it seems rather difficult to arrive at this etymology on the basis of classical ancient Greek, but then Britomartis was apparently a Cretan figure (cf. Graves 1: 299–302).

and they are a necessary ingredient of Cinderella tales and of a number of other types of folktales. While, on the one hand, weakening the patriarchal order, the strong-minded stepmother seems to confirm it, on the other, because her rule is shown as unfair and tyrannical, and without her passive husband, the monstrosity of her ambitions would have never been exposed.

Instead of suffering her lot patiently, as a conventional Cinderella figure would have done, Aravis decides to commit suicide by piercing her heart with a dagger. This gesture is abrupt, violent and dramatic, and it might befit a heroic and aristocratic man. However, it is a well-established tradition for a woman to commit suicide when faced with an unwanted, or violent, suitor, the best example of which is certainly the historical character of Lucretia, who takes her own life having been raped by Tarquin, the Roman king's son.[3] Aravis is dissuaded from her hasty decision by her Narnian – and speaking – mare Hwin. Hwin inspires her with the idea of escaping to Narnia, and, first of all, with a longing for Narnia, which, in *The Chronicles*, is a convenient criterion by which the worthiness of a character can be judged. Those who do not pass muster, from a moral point of view, are, at the same time, hostile or indifferent to Narnia, but if one feels nostalgia for it, one is already half-saved, even though one may still have many vices. Unlike her parallel character, the boy Shasta, who is the protagonist of *The Horse and His Boy*, and who eventually becomes her husband, Aravis has to choose between Narnia and real death, while his choice involves only a death-like slavery. This is in fact one of the most fundamental differences between male and female characters in romances. Unlike the former, the latter are never looking for adventures; their adventures are either imposed on them, by banishment, for example, or they have to embark on a dangerous style of life because the only alternative is death. As Helen Cooper claims:

> [W]omen who find themselves in a situation analogous to the hero's quest in romance are most often victims rather than agents, compelled to leave the safety of their own homes and at other people's mercy. The lone woman at large in romance is more likely to be cast adrift in a rudderless boat than to choose to follow the call of adventure. . . . (53)

The situation of Aravis is in fact half way between that of a free agent following "the call of adventure" and of a passive victim "compelled to leave the safety of her home." She is "compelled," but not by means of direct, physical force, as is the case of banished heroines. On the contrary, she is compelled by her own moral sense, and leaves her home even though nobody forces her to do so; indeed she leaves it spite of those around her, with the sole exception of her faithful mare.

[3] Also the Cretan Britomartis, pursued by the amorous king Minos, throws herself into the sea (cf. Graves 1: 299).

When we compare Shasta and Aravis, it is striking that the girl is, on the one hand, shown as a far more accomplished creature than her male counterpart; on the other, however, he is clearly, with all his faults, or because of them, more human and much easier to identify with. It no doubt belongs to the romance standards that female characters are often shown as idealized, but rather passive, and also here it is Shasta, and not Aravis, who has the most exciting adventures. As opposed, however, to the mainstream of the romance tradition, Aravis's accomplishments are not of a particularly feminine kind. We learn, for example, little, or nothing, about her beauty or other perfections of her outward appearance. What we do learn is that Aravis is a perfect horsewoman, an infinitely better horse rider than Shasta, which is important in a story in which most of the action is connected with horse-riding. Shasta's inability to ride symbolizes his having been brought up in a fisherman's family, while Aravis's skill is naturally related to her being an upper-class girl, which she is in all kinds of ways.

Another of her talents is the ability to speak well. She is a good storyteller, which also betokens her superior education:

> Aravis immediately began, sitting quite still and using a rather different tone and style from her usual one. For in Calormen, story-telling (whether the stories are true or made up) is a thing you're taught, just as English boys and girls are taught essay-writing. The difference is that people want to hear the stories, whereas I never heard of anyone who wanted to read the essays. (44–45)

This expression of the author's genuine admiration at the Calormene standards of education may sound a little strange in view of what we have already said about the generally critical, to put it mildly, vision of the Calormene society shown in this book.

Aravis has inherited a highly refined tradition, even though this tradition seems warped by excessive formality and love of empty ritual. Of course the matter is more complicated due to the fact that many Oriental, or quasi-Oriental, stereotypes also belong to the phenomenon called effeminacy. The complexity of the Orient as the Other is no doubt structurally similar to the complexity of the concept of the woman as the Other. The Calormenes often hide their rather cruel and perfidious nature behind a mask of great kindness and politeness, and such treacherousness is part of the stereotype of effeminacy, or even femininity itself. Even Aravis, who represents, in many ways, what is best in Calormen, has a streak of cruelty in her character, but, unlike the stereotypical woman, she does not particularly try to hide it, and does not even seem particularly ashamed of it:

> Then I called the maid who was to go with me to the woods and perform the rites of Zardeenah and told her to wake me very early in the morning. And I became merry with her and gave her wine to drink; but I had mixed such things in her cup that I knew she must sleep for a night and a day. (50)

Later Shasta asks her about that girl:

> "And what happened to the girl – the one you drugged?" asked Shasta.
> "Doubtless she was beaten for sleeping late," said Aravis coolly. "But she was a tool and spy of my stepmother's. I am very glad they should beat her."
> "I say, that was hardly fair," said Shasta.
> "I did not do any of those things for the sake of pleasing you," said Aravis. (53)

Eventually, Aravis is punished for her insensitivity to the sufferings of that girl by Aslan, the great lion, himself, who scratches her back with his big paw leaving five bloody marks that later heal without causing any lasting harm to the girl's health. As Aslan explains the matter to her:

> The scratches on your back, tear for tear, throb for throb, blood for blood, were equal to the stripes laid on the back of your stepmother's slave because of the drugged sleep you cast upon her. You needed to know what it felt like. (216–17)

Aravis's punishment is broadly analogous to that of Sir Gawain, the hero of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, who receives from the mysterious, frightening, but also, to some extent, fatherly, Green Knight a bloody mark on his neck to make him realize his disloyalty to the Green Knight and his falling short of the ideal of perfection that he pursues. This ideal is represented by Gawain's favourite symbol, that of pentangle, the five-pointed star, with its five points representing the five virtues of which Gawain is particularly proud. Aravis's five stripes on her back seem to represent a kind of anti-pentangle, and are a sign of her imperfection, but also of her being singled out by Aslan, who does not often take the trouble of personally chastising the people whose behaviour he might object to. It is evident that Aravis has learnt her lesson, instead of reacting haughtily, as she did when Shasta criticized her over her dealings with the slave girl. Having heard Aslan's verdict, she is now worried about the future lot of the girl she had drugged, so she asks empathetically: "Will any more harm come to her by what I did?" (217).

Without that lesson, she would never have become fit to marry Shasta, who, by now, is revealed to be the first-born son of the king of Archenland, a country neighbouring Narnia, and his real name is Cor. Aravis used to be supercilious towards Shasta, thinking herself far better educated and, first of all, much better born. Now she even seems to be angry when Shasta (or rather Cor) mentions his social inferiority consisting in his not having been given a proper aristocratic upbringing, even though one may doubt the authenticity of her having overcome her deeply ingrained snobbery; after all, she knows by now that her companion, with all his woeful educational deficiencies, is a prince of royal blood. At the same time, Cor's newly discovered aristocratic background is in keeping with the standards of chivalric romances, and the rules of that genre had a substantial

influence on this book. The lovers in chivalric romances may start their relationship as socially mismatched, but this state of affairs is not allowed to continue, as if class solidarity were a necessary ingredient of a successful erotic relationship. The Middle English romance *Havelok, the Dane* is a good, though by no means unique, example of this rule, and it is, moreover, slightly similar to the story of Aravis and Shasta. The heroine of the romance is forced to marry a man of low social status, even though she is herself a princess. Later, however, it turns out that her husband is the son of a king, of which he himself at first was not aware.

Knowing that C. S. Lewis was a man steeped in Biblical lore, one can be easily tempted to interpret *The Horse and His Boy* along allegorical lines. The journey across the desert from the land of slavery (Calormen) to the land of freedom (Narnia) is in fact rather heavily reminiscent of the exodus of the People of Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land. Shasta is clearly a Moses figure. Exactly like Moses, he was found in a basket floating on a river. He is a Narnian brought up in the Calormene society, but treated rather coldly by that society, and feeling no loyalty to it, just as Moses was brought up as an Egyptian and later turned against Egypt and its, from his point of view, wicked ways. Aravis stands for the People of Israel itself and her name is almost an anagram of Israel. Shasta feels responsible for her and helps her a lot, even though, just like the People of Israel towards Moses, she was often ungrateful towards him.

Thus, the discourse of Orientalism, as represented by Lewis, is here made a little more complicated by exploiting the divisions within the Oriental culture itself. This brings our attention to the fact that European Orientalism was probably to quite a large extent shaped by the Jewish, and expressed in the Old Testament, perception of Egypt and other Middle Eastern empires, even though there is no denying that an even greater role must have been played in this process by the Greek conflict with the ancient Persian empire. Interestingly, both Jewish and Greek cultures, although they symbolized a resistance to Oriental despotism, were themselves in due time represented as more or less Oriental (which is perhaps more true of the Jews than of the Greeks), especially vis-à-vis Western Europe.

But Lewis was also a Christian apologist, and this fact may suggest that Shasta is, like Aslan, though in a different sense, a figure of Christ. His profession is basically that of a fisherman; he was brought up by a man who played, to some extent, the role of his father, but was not really his father, because his kingdom, and he was to become the king of Archenland, is in a different world. He also has a rather special relationship with Aslan, who treats him as if he were his favourite child. Aslan comforts him at the Tombs of Tashbaan, where Shasta is isolated and surrounded by darkness, like Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane. In other words, Shasta is to Aslan more or less what

Aslan is to his godlike father, the mysterious Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea. Both Shasta and Aslan are rather hard on Aravis for her show of callous indifference, and Aravis, in this context, is of course the Holy Church and the Bride of Christ, in keeping with the traditional Christian interpretation of the Canticle of Canticles. Like the Shulamite woman in the Canticle of Canticles, she has, like all Calormenes, a dark complexion. Her being punished for her ruthlessness, and her meek acceptance of that punishment, shows her belonging already to the world of the New Testament, in which simple acts of revenge, or cruelty perpetrated on one's enemies, similar to the way the People of Israel treat the Egyptians who try to prevent the exodus or pursue the fleeing Israelites, are no longer tolerated. Her being presented as an excellent storyteller shows her priestly dignity because the story she tells is that of the miracle of Incarnation,[4] near death and symbolical Resurrection. Lewis's admiration for the ancient People of Israel is also visible in his admiration for Aravis's accomplishments. Naturally, this analogy has its limitations; Shasta and Aravis do not have to conquer Narnia, their Promised Land, since it is already in the hands of Aslan's loyal friends and worshippers. But Narnia in Lewis's septalogy is shown as a land which, similarly to the Ancient Israel, is constantly in danger of being conquered by Aslan's enemies, and this danger, from time to time, materializes.

The Horse and His Boy has also a clearly ironical aspect. The would-be pharaoh, who pursues the fleeing party of the lovers of Narnia and whose forces are duly annihilated, is called Rabadash, and he is a son of the ruler of Calormen rather than the ruler himself. This is quite logical; it is the Old Testament that is difficult to believe on this point, since it is hard to imagine the pharaoh himself chasing after the Israelites, who were, after all, little more than a group of runaway slaves. In point of fact, Rabadash is not interested in Shasta and his tiny group, composed of two children and two talking horses. He wants to conquer Narnia and to force Susan, a queen of Narnia (there are two queens there, and two kings) to become his wife. The problem with Rabadash is that he is not only thoroughly spoilt and abominable from a moral point of view, but also exceedingly vain and easily loses touch with reality. Aslan, having helped, though rather discreetly, the armed forces of Narnia and Archenland, metes out a form of punishment to Rabadash by turning him into a donkey, and yet giving him a chance to regain his human shape. Following St. Francis, Lewis compares the human body to an ass in *The Four Loves*:

> Ass is exquisitely right because no one in his senses can either revere or hate a donkey. It is a useful, sturdy, lazy, obstinate, patient, lovable and infuriating beast; deserving now the stick and now a carrot; both pathetically and absurdly beautiful. So the body. (117)

[4] She herself, in a sense, represents that miracle because of her being endowed with a simple, though not infallible, moral sense, even though educated in an amoral environment.

Thus, the theme of friendship in *The Horse and His Boy* is inextricably connected with that of love, and both are anchored in the Biblical and Christian tradition, as well as in the tradition of the chivalric romance.

The Oriental, or rather quasi-Oriental, motifs in this book may of course be easily dismissed as based on Western prejudices and completely unreliable stereotypes. But perhaps we should ask why Lewis needed those Calormenes in this particular context. The answer seems to be that Calormen is an almost chemically pure model of a land where neither real love nor friendship are possible. The Calormenes are, in some respects, highly civilized, but they basically have no interests, apart from self-interest, and it would be extremely difficult to imagine there anybody, or any institution, that would pursue any activity that could not be motivated by narrow self-interest. That is why there does not seem to have been any artistic, educational, or scientific activity worthy of that name.

But the situation of the typical Calormenes is even worse than this; they have no real "self." They have totally adapted themselves to slavery, which means that they are closer to the condition of some animals or automata than to that of human beings. Aravis, when she conceives the intention to kill herself to avoid marrying the man she cannot love, or even respect, in fact discovers her "self" as an entity that cannot be reduced to a mere herd instinct, and will not yield to social pressure. In *The Four Loves*, Lewis distinguishes between two kinds of pleasures: "Now it is a very old discovery that pleasures can be divided into two classes; those which would not be pleasures at all unless they were preceded by desire, and those which are pleasures in their own right and need no such preparation" (19). He calls them "Need-pleasures" and "Appreciative Pleasures" (20). Lewis does not, naturally, condemn the Need-pleasures, but he certainly considers the Appreciative Pleasures to be of a higher kind and connected with the ability to appreciate things for the sake of their own intrinsic value, not just according to how they can help us.

It seems that Aravis's discovery of the self, or perhaps we should say, the higher self, is based on her ability to experience not so much an appreciative pleasure, but rather an appreciative displeasure. This is why she rejects disdainfully any suggestions that the marriage she spurns may bring her all kinds of material comfort, and also raise even further her social status. It is not accidental that this state of the heroic virgin's mind is connected, firstly, with the readiness to commit suicide (in this way she acknowledges that there are higher values even than one's own life, which should not be understood as approval for suicide itself) and, secondly, with the readiness to accept the "good news" from the apostle mare that there exists somewhere a kingdom of the free who never shall be slaves.

This ability to conceive of an essentially different world, and to look at one's own world, as it were, from outside, was regarded by Romano Guardini as a crucial novelty introduced into the Western culture by the Middle Ages:

> In the Middle Ages, we observe a thorough change in people's attitude toward the world, and the world view. People believe in the Biblical revelation, which makes them aware of God's reality that can be found above and beyond the world. (18)

It is of course rather difficult to say to what extent Aravis is medieval, or perhaps even post-medieval, but she is an *anima naturaliter Christiana*, a natural Christian, or rather Aslanian, in that she has no trouble accepting the faith in Aslan, about whom she heard nothing in Calormen, or she heard of him as an evil demon who can take the shape of a lion. It also seems important that she is an excellent horse rider, a *chevalier*, who has a very good rapport with her horse (which seems to stand for "natural" movement, rather than merely mechanical). She can thus move swiftly and efficiently, also in the metaphorical sense, and, without being tied to any social background, or tradition, she will move within the bounds of a harmonious relationship with nature, which is also something associated with the pre-industrial Middle Ages. Her androgyny is a fulfilment of masculine dreams about an ideal woman whose "masculinity" does not diminish her femininity, but rather purges it of those features that a man might find, especially in the long run, disagreeable in a woman. Thus, she may be censorious and hard to please, but she is not captious, petty-minded, or nagging; her aristocratic aloofness is compensated by unswerving loyalty and great courage. It is then a femininity that has been purified, or rather that is seen as purged of any obviously negative aspects, just as her friend Lasaraleen represents a femininity that has been "purged" of all "positive" aspects, that is, of such that could link her with the world of Western (or Northern) values and that of heroic masculinity.

3

To what extent Lewis was really prejudiced against the Orientals is not an easy matter to solve. Those who would like to jump to the easy, much too easy, conclusion that he indeed was deeply prejudiced should be warned that he, a Christian apologist, did not hesitate to call Jesus Christ an Oriental "according to the flesh" ("Petitionary Prayer" 219). He also manages to combine his firm belief in the Jews, or rather Ancient Hebrews, as he often calls them, being a "chosen people," that is, chosen by God to be receivers and transmitters of God's revelations and miracles, with the awareness that they were also Orientals.

Lewis talks in the following way of his at first disappointing experience of reading the Old Testament Book of Proverbs:

> What a dull, remote thing, for example, the Book of Proverbs seems at a first glance: bearded Orientals uttering endless platitudes as if in a parody of the *Arabian Nights*. Compared with Plato or Aristotle . . . it is not thought at all. Then, suddenly, just as you are going to give it up, your eye falls on the words, 'If thine enemy by hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he be thirsty give him water to drink' (25: 21). One rubs one's eyes. So they were saying that already. ("Psalms" 219)

It has already been pointed out that Lewis's conception of Calormen owes much to *The Arabian Nights*, and it is characteristic that, in the above quotation, the Arabs and the Hebrews are treated as two forms of the same Oriental culture. But the point of course is that the "badness" and dullness of the "bearded Orientals" is represented here as a necessary concomitant of their occasionally brilliant moral insights.

This is even more clearly visible in the following quotation:

> I do not at all mean that the Hebrews were just 'better' than the Greeks and the Romans. On the contrary we shall find in the Psalms expressions of a cruelty more vindictive and a self-righteousness more complete than anything in the classics. If we ignore such passages and read only a few selected favourite psalms, we miss the point. For the point is precisely this: that these same fanatic and homicidal Hebrews, and not the more enlightened peoples, again and again – for brief moments – reach a Christian level of spirituality. It is not that they are better or worse than the Pagans, but they are both better and worse. One is forced to recognise that, in one respect, these alien poets are our predecessors, and the only predecessors we can find in all antiquity. (Lewis, "Psalms" 220)

It is therefore a matter of relatively little consequence that the Calormenes in *The Chronicles of Narnia* are generally presented as highly off-putting aliens whose civilization is profoundly barbarous, in spite of certain elements of refinement. What is more important is whether this barbarity is not itself a cloak that covers the Calormenes' ability to surpass the civilized peoples in some important respects. Perhaps the point of their existence, just as in the case of the ancient Hebrews, is to produce, maybe even isolated, moral values that other, more enlightened, and certainly more likeable, peoples are unable to produce.

Indeed, this unpromising culture produces two characters that seem to be able, at least partly, to redeem it: Aravis, the female knight, and the brave soldier Emeth, familiar to the readers of the last part of the Narnia tales, *The Last Battle*, who from a pious devotee of Tash, the Calormen god, in fact an evil demon, develops into a servant and admirer of Aslan, that is, the true God. These two examples show the peculiar genius of Calormen, a quality that we would never find in Narnia, and which consists in being the land where the miracles of incarnation and redemption are possible, where creatures apparently enslaved by

inhuman conventions have, nevertheless, a spark of divine inspiration inside themselves that is capable of transforming them by developing their essentially noble, even though somewhat deformed, instincts. It is true that also the earthly characters, such as Edmund, Eustace, or Jill, undergo a moral transformation and a kind of awakening, but they are different in this respect from Aravis and Emeth in that they are guided all along this process by Aslan; they cannot rely on any innate qualities unlike Aravis and Emeth. It seems that the reason why this is so is because the latter are products of an essentially aristocratic society, a society which may have all the glaring faults of degenerate aristocracy but still contains a potential for developing in some chosen characters – few and far between though they are – a certain instinctive nobility. One might attribute it to Lewis's own social snobbery (he was a little proud of his Welsh aristocratic background) that he apparently did not see any possibility of salvation for those Calormenes who actually were slaves, or slave-like servants, of their horse riding masters, and who display a typical slavish mentality.

No matter how we tried to contextualize the motif of Calormen, it still remains of course a highly unpleasant place with even more unpleasant racist connotations due to its vaguely Middle Eastern look and feel. In Paul F. Ford, we find the following statement:

> C. S. Lewis was a man of his time and socioeconomic class. Like many Englishmen of his era, Lewis was unconsciously but regrettably unsympathetic to things and people Middle Eastern. Thus he sometimes engages in contrasting things Narnian and things Calormene. He intends this in a broadly comic way, almost vaudevillian. But in our post-September 11, 2001, world, he would, I am sure, want to reconsider this insensitivity. (363)

Ford may be essentially right about Lewis's prejudices, but the suggestion that the terrorist activity of some of the inhabitants of the Middle East would, or perhaps even should, make this writer, or anybody, more sympathetic towards that region and its culture is, at least in my opinion, rather preposterous.

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Subversive Form, Provocative Content and Truth at All Costs: Liberature of B. S. Johnson

Abstract: The purpose of this article is to approach extreme and subversive experience in B. S. Johnson's novels. Johnson's fictions and his critical writings raise the problem of the condition of contemporary literature and its claims to represent the truth about reality and human existence in the era of electronic media. His novels like *The Unfortunates* can be viewed as classic examples of a movement known as liberature: openly defiant and subversive literature which treats formal aspects of a literary work as at least equally important as the content. Experimental and subversive techniques used by Johnson in his novels are aimed at compromising the traditional narrative as incompatible and falsifying means of giving an objective truth. According to Johnson, the function of telling fictional stories has been taken over by cinema. Storytelling in a traditional understanding is lie-telling. The novel, instead of competing with cinema, should rather turn to its appropriate task: to tell about subjective experiences and mental conditions that fall outside attempts of cinematic representations. Traditional literary forms fail to represent a credible image of a flowing, unstable reality. Thus, the most urgent task for a writer is to work out new forms and techniques that would enable him or her to create literature which could claim the right to give a genuine representation of life and reality. This study aims to analyze experimental and subversive aspects of Johnson's novels as well as techniques used by him to create liberature.

Several months before his death in November 1973, Bryan Stanley Johnson, or B. S. Johnson, under which name he is most widely recognized, wrote his famous introduction to the collection of short stories *Aren't You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs?* The introduction opened with the following words:

> It is a fact of crucial significance in the history of the novel this century that James Joyce opened the first cinema in Dublin in 1909. Joyce saw very early on that film must usurp some of the prerogatives which until then had belonged almost exclusively to the novelist. Film could tell a story more directly, in less time and with more concrete detail than a novel; certain aspects of character could be more easily delineated and kept constantly before the audience (for example, physical characteristics like a limp, a scar, particular ugliness or beauty); no novelist's description of a battle squadron at sea in a gale could really hope to compete with that in a well-shot film; and why should anyone who simply wanted to be told a story spend all his spare time for a week or weeks reading a book when he could experience the same thing in a version in some ways superior at his local cinema in only one evening? (Introduction)

Johnson considered the development of cinematography as a watershed and a turning point in the history of literature in the twentieth century. Reflecting upon the role and importance of literature, he expressed his belief that literature, in order to survive, needs to concentrate on those things that it can still do best, that is, the precise use of language, exploitation of the technological fact of the book and the explication of thought (Introduction). Johnson wrote:

> Film is an excellent medium for showing things, but it is very poor at taking an audience inside characters' minds, at telling it what people are thinking. . . . In some ways the history of the novel in the twentieth century has seen large areas of the old territory of the novelist increasingly taken over by other media, until the only thing the novelist can with any certainty call exclusively his own is the inside of his own skull: and that is what he should be exploring, rather than anachronistically fighting a battle he is bound to lose. (Introduction)

These words were not uttered in vain. Johnson's whole literary career is a tireless realization of his theoretical assumptions which can be summarized in a few words: an overwhelming desire to make literature tell the truth about life and reality, a pursuit of techniques and forms that are most suited and adequate to convey the truth – which also meant inventing numerous subversive techniques. His literary credo can best be summarized in his own words:

> I am not interested in telling lies in my own novels. A useful distinction between literature and other writing for me is that the former teaches one something true about life: and how can you convey truth in a vehicle of fiction? The two terms, truth and fiction, are opposites, and it must logically be impossible. (Introduction)

Johnson's firm belief was that traditional literary forms became exhausted, clapped out so that no matter how good the writers who now attempt to follow them are, they "cannot be made to work for our time" because such writing must inevitably be "anachronistic, invalid, irrelevant, and perverse" (Introduction). His beliefs and theoretical assumptions urged him to pursue new ways and solutions to write about life and personal experience (for the two were the same for him). His literary experiments which did not find understanding and appreciation in the decade of his writing career have been heartily welcomed by readers and literary critics in recent years and have been winning more and more supporters.

Some critics place Johnson among a literary movement called liberature. What is liberature? It would be useful to look swiftly at the definition provided by Zenon Fajfer, a Polish avant-garde artist, poet and translator, one of the founders of the movement. In Fajfer's words, liberature means total literature – that is, literature for and in which text and space of the book as a physical object are equally important. Thus a book no longer incorporates literary work: it becomes one itself (Bazarnik and Fajfer).

Literature defined in such terms seems to have been present in culture for at least over a century. From Mallarmé or even Sterne, to Russian futurists, Joyce and Beckett, and avant-garde fiction by writers such as Aglaya Veterannyi, liberary-like writings are present in literary history, although the movement has grown in strength during recent decades. B. S. Johnson is also one of the most prominent figures who can be classified in the movement. During the literary career spanning a mere ten years (brought to a violent and unexpected end by his suicide), Johnson managed to write over a dozen works covering all literary genres: dramas, screenplays, plays for the radio, poems, short stories and novels.

In this article, I would like to concentrate on his prose writings, for prose is supposed to be the most successful field of his literary experiments. Johnson himself, by trial and error, turned to the novel as the most suitable form in which to express what he wished to express. He rejected stage-drama as having too many limitations, verse as being unacceptable at that time on the scale he wished to attempt, radio and television as placing too many intermediaries between the writer and the audience (Introduction). This led him to the "resultant choice of the novel as the form possessing fewest limitations, and closest contact with the greatest audience" (Introduction).

Johnson's first novel, *Travelling People*, contains many experiments, but they are not as radical as those in his later works: the novel is rather a prelude to what followed next. Yet it is an important piece of work that introduces many of the ideas that will be developed and mastered in Johnson's later novels. There are certain characteristics, however, that will remain unchanged or be only slightly altered in his later works. One of them is the idea of writing about his own experience. The main character is called Henry Henry and he resembles the author at that time. Like his hero, Johnson could say: "I've just finished a university course, and I want very much to relax after the strain of finals" (qtd. in Coe 14). The novel depicts the adventures of Henry, his summer work at an exclusive country club and a series of personal and romantic affairs. The book closes with an image of Henry, who, sitting in a working-class transport café, concludes that "after a whole summer spent watching the idle rich people at play in supposedly Edenic surroundings, he would rather be sitting down to an indifferent meal in a company of lorry drivers" (qtd. in Coe 15).

Those slight marks of dissatisfaction with the social norms and arrangements of the Welfare State will also echo in Johnson's later novels. *Travelling People* opens with a passage that – in Johnson's words – summed up much of his thinking on the novel at that point:

> Seated comfortably in a wood and wickerwork chair of eighteenth-century Chinese manufacture, I began seriously to meditate upon the form of my allegedly full-time literary sublimations. . . . After comparatively little consideration, I decided that one style for one novel was a convention that I resented most strongly: it was perhaps comparable to eating a

> meal in which each course had been cooked in the same manner. The style of each chapter should spring naturally from its subject matter. Furthermore, I meditated, at ease in far eastern luxury, Dr. Johnson's remarks about each member of an audience always being aware that he is in a theatre could with complete relevance be applied also to the novel reader, who surely always knows that he is reading a book and not, for instance, taking part in a punitive raid on the curiously-shaped inhabitants of another planet. From this I concluded that it was not only permissible to expose the mechanism of a novel, but by so doing I should come nearer to reality and truth: adapting to refute, in fact, the ancients: *Artis est monstrare artem*. Pursuing this thought, I realised that it would be desirable to have interludes between my chapters in which I could stand back, so to speak, from my novel, and talk about it with the reader, or with those parts of myself which might hold differing opinions, if necessary; and in which technical questions could be considered, and quotations from other writers included, where relevant, without any question of destroying the reader's suspension of disbelief, since such suspension was not to be attempted. (qtd. in Introduction)

Indeed, *Travelling People* employs eight separate styles or conventions for nine chapters; these styles include an interior monologue, a letter, extracts from a journal and a film script (Johnson, Introduction). The first and last chapters share one style designed to give the book cyclical unity within the motif announced by its title and epigraph (Johnsons, Introduction). As Johnson admits, the passage quoted above was deliberately a pastiche of eighteenth-century English (Introduction). What he does not mention is that it also refers directly to one of Samuel Beckett's earliest novels, *Murphy*. A discerning reader will link the above passage with the opening sentences of Beckett's first novel: there we have Murphy sitting naked in his rocking chair of undressed teak and contemplating the dualistic nature of mind and body. Beckett was the writer Johnson admired the most, sharing and following many of Beckett's ideas throughout his literary career.

As for the reference to eighteenth-century literature, Johnson openly acknowledges his debt to Sterne, particularly the black pages of *Tristram Shandy* (Introduction). He extended the device beyond Sterne's use of it to indicate a character's death (Introduction). In the section of *Travelling People* which contains the interior monologue of an old man prone to heart attacks, Johnson used random-pattern grey to indicate unconscious after a heart attack, a regular-pattern grey to indicate sleep or recuperative unconsciousness, and subsequently black when he dies (Johnson, Introduction). As Jonathan Coe reports, Johnson would later sum up his first novel as a "disaster" and did not allow it to be reprinted. He dismissed *Travelling People* as a novel that mingled fiction with autobiography in a way he did not approve of (Coe 15).

Albert Angelo, the second novel by Johnson, is one that develops certain motifs and problems indicated in *Travelling People*, and introduces new ones that will recur in his later prose works. It draws on Johnson's own experience and its hero is merely the author in disguise, whose real experiences as a supply

teacher are only thinly veiled. *Albert Angelo* is prefaced with an extract from Samuel Beckett's novel *The Unnamable*:

> When I think, that is to say, no, let it stand, when, I think of the time I've wasted with these bran-dips, beginning with Murphy, who wasn't even the first, when I had me, on the premises, within easy reach, tottering under my own skin and bones, real ones, rotting with solitude and neglect. . . . I'm not at home to anything, my doors are shot against them, perhaps that's how I'll find silence and peace at last, by opening my doors and letting myself be devoured, they'll stop howling, they'll start eating, the maws not howling. Open up, open up, you'll be all right, you'll see. (273)

These words became Johnson's rule of thumb as a novelist. He admitted:

> I really discovered what I should be doing with *Albert Angelo* (1964) where I broke through the English disease of the objective correlative to speak truth directly if solipsistically in the novel form, and heard my own small voice. (Introduction)

This is a novel which expresses Johnson's dissatisfaction with traditional novelistic conventions, and the dissatisfaction is conveyed by a fragmentary and episodic narrative. The main character, Albert – or Albie, as he is called by his students – is an unfulfilled frustrated architect who earns his living by teaching in London schools. Teaching is a highly unsatisfactory and frustrating occupation for Albert, who considers architecture to be his true vocation. Architecture and architectonic descriptions evoke associations with the process of writing. Both constructing a building and constructing a literary work require the same amount of ingenuity, precision, talent and patience. We see Albert at his drawing board when he attempts to design buildings. We see him in the classroom teaching and, after hours, visiting night cafes with his friend Terry. The more or less conventional narrative proceeds for most of the novel until an unexpected authorial intervention occurs. All of a sudden, we are told: "OH, FUCK ALL THIS LYING!" (*Albert Angelo* 163), and what then follows is a section titled "Disintegration." The author rejects the suspension of disbelief and speaks in his own voice:

> – Fuck all this lying look what im really trying to write about is writing not all this stuff about architecture trying to say something about writing about my writing im my hero though what a useless appellation my first character then im trying to say something about me through him albert an architect when whats the point in covering up covering up covering over pretending pretending I can say anything through him that is anything that I would be interested in saying. (167)

At the end of the section, the author concludes by saying to the reader: "Go elsewhere for their lives. Life is not like that, is just not like that" (167). If life is not like that, there is no point in pretending. There is no point either in writing

literature that is so untruthful. Yet, soon afterwards Johnson adds: "But even I (even I!) would not leave such a mess, such a mess, so many loose ends" (167). As a result, what follows is the last and shortest section titled "Coda," in which the author returns to fiction or at least to something we can call a semi-fiction: we again meet Albert and witness his end – he is thrown by his pupils into the local canal where he drowns.

The novel contains a set of avant-garde and subversive narrative techniques. One of the most interesting issues raised by the book is the editorial challenge of conveying simultaneously thoughts of a teacher and those of his pupils (Introduction). Johnson resolves the problem by putting the teacher's thoughts on the right-hand side of the page in italics and his and his pupils' speech on the left in roman, so that, though the reader obviously cannot read both at once, when he has read both he will have seen that they are simultaneous and have enacted such simultaneity for himself (Introduction). Another famous device employed by Johnson in the novel is cutting out a section in a page through which future events are revealed to the reader even before he or she reaches the following pages.

Johnson departs from fictionalizing for good in his next novel, *Trawl*. As Jonathan Coe reports, Johnson's publisher at the time considered it to be not a novel but an autobiography. Johnson, however, disagreed, saying: "It is a novel, I insisted and can prove; what it is not is fiction" (qtd. in Coe 19). There is no plot in the novel, only an interior monologue of the main character, who is the author himself. Nor are there any invented characters, although many of them still appear under changed names. The book describes a three-week voyage Johnson undertook on a fishing trawler in the autumn of 1963. The monologue consists of descriptions and reflections on the journey interspersed with numerous reminiscences from the past, flashbacks recalling incidents from Johnson's past, many of them romantic or sexual, most of them unsatisfactory and unhappy (Coe 19). The author-narrator recalls the episode of his evacuation during the Second World War, an event that exerted influence on the young boy he was at that time. Breaks in the mind's workings are symbolized by spaces punctuated by dots at decimal point level. The device employed here will reappear in his later novels, yet the spaces will become empty, without any dots. The rhythms of the language of *Trawl* attempted to parallel those of the sea, and much use was made of the trawl itself as a metaphor for the way the subconscious mind may appear to work (Introduction).

The novel begins with words that – again – refer directly to the prose of Beckett:

> I . . always with I . . one starts from . . one and I share the same character . . are one . . . . . one always starts with I . . one . . . . alone . . . . . sole . . . . . single . . . . . (*Trawl* 7)

These words as well as the whole novel express Johnson's firm belief that there is no escape from subjectivity and every narration is always subjective. Thus the only possible truth flowing from direct experience is that concerning the narrator's own psychical condition. Consequently, if literature is to convey any truth about human experience, it has to distance itself from telling fictional stories and concentrate on the experience and feelings of the author.

In the introduction to *Aren't You Rather Young to be Writing Memoirs*, Johnson referred once more to Beckett, quoting his famous words:

> What I am saying does not mean that there will henceforth be no form in art. It only means that there will be new form, and that this form will be of such a type that it admits the chaos, and does not try to say that the chaos is really something else. The forms and the chaos remain separate. . . . to find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now. (qtd. in Introduction)

He supplemented Beckett's words with a comment: "Whether or not it can be demonstrated that all is chaos, certainly all is change: the very process of life itself is growth and decay at an enormous variety of rates" (Introduction).

Another attempt made by Johnson to achieve this objective was *The Unfortunates*. This is, unarguably, the most subversive and experimental novel of Johnson, a major stepping stone in the evolution of thinking about the novel form in the twentieth century. Johnson's fourth and, perhaps, most famous and recognizable novel, *The Unfortunates* seems to be the most faithful and honest embodiment of his theoretical assumptions. It consists of 27 sections not bound together but put loosely in a small box. There is no fixed order in which they are meant to be read; they are rather to be shuffled and read in whichever random order the reader happens to take them.

The randomness of the event created in this way corresponds to the randomness and chaos of life. Johnson says:

> Life does not tell stories. Life is chaotic, fluid, random; it leaves myriads of ends untied, untidily. Writers can extract a story from life only by strict, close selection, and this must mean falsification. Telling stories really is telling lies. (Introduction)

A novel, in order to give a genuine representation of reality (or to come as close to this as possible), to stand for the truth and reflect the truth, needs to adjust itself to this perspective. Thus, a novel needs to reject not only the old, worn-out techniques: the third-person omniscient narrator, transparent language and semi-realistic, semi-fictional convention, but also the traditional form of the book as such, with a fixed order of events imposed by the author. As Johnson reports:

> The main technical problem with *The Unfortunates* was the randomness of the material. That is, the memories of Tony and the routine football reporting, the past and the present, interwove in a completely random manner, without chronology. This is the way the mind works, my mind anyway, and for reasons given the novel was to be as nearly as possible a re-created transcript of how my mind worked during eight hours on this particular Saturday. (Introduction)

It is hard to imagine an invention more closely representative of the chaotic and random nature of life than a book which consists of a set of signatures placed loosely in a box.

There are empty spaces in the text itself – an idea that was used by Johnson in his previous novels and that will reappear in his next novel, *House Mother Normal*, with a double impact. Here, the empty spaces and gaps in the text appear mostly when the narrator digs into his memory and is flooded by blurred images or tries to remember something he is no longer able to. In terms of the narrative mode, it is, again, an interior monologue in which episodes and events from the past intercut and intersperse with present actions. The action is enclosed within eight hours on a Saturday afternoon. The author and narrator are one and the same person. For the first time in Johnson's novels, the characters and events are no longer fictionalized: he describes himself and his own life, the other characters in the book are his friends or relatives appearing under their real names; the same goes for the places and actions. He works as a football reporter and is sent out to cover a match. When he arrives at his destination, he realizes this is the same city where his best friend Tony studied as a postgraduate, and where he himself used to come on numerous occasions. The narrator spends the rest of the afternoon trying to concentrate on the football match but is, instead, flooded by the memories of Tony that recur and resurface against his will.

Johnson's next novel, *House Mother Normal*, consists of nine chapters which present a single set of events through the eyes of nine different people: eight pensioners in an old people's home and the House Mother. We are presented with a single and – exceptionally in Johnson's writings – fictional event simultaneously from ten different points of views. Each chapter begins with a brief presentation of the speaking voice. What is significant is that the respective narrators are presented through their deficiencies in speaking, hearing and all the possible impairments and illnesses they suffer from. Noticeably, each successive character is more disabled than the preceding one so that the monologues become more and more fragmented, partial and incoherent as the book progresses. So does the language of each chapter: gaps in the workings of the mind are indicated by empty spaces in the text. With each monologue, the spaces are longer and more frequent. Thus Sarah Lamson's interior monologue is virtually free from empty spaces, more or less coherent and lucid, but as we reach the last speaker, Rosetta Stanton, the chapter amounts to a few

disconnected words and sounds scattered at random over the pages. The explanation is given at the beginning of each chapter – Sarah Lamson, the first speaker, is 74, with her hearing seventy-five per cent intact and a maximum CQ count of ten (Coe 24), whilst Stanton has a CQ count of zero and a long list of various disabilities. Finally, we have the House Mother's version of events, which turns out to be even more unreliable and bizarre than those of her elderly charges.

As Johnson admitted, his aim in writing *House Mother Normal* was "to say something about the things we call normal and abnormal" (Introduction). Indeed, by the end of the novel the reader is left wondering who is more normal or abnormal – a decrepit old pensioner whose perception of reality is blurred by senility or the callous and uncaring young House Mother, a person who is supposed to take care of them. In fact, Johnson says much more than this. The deformities and deficiencies of all kinds that affect the narrative voices of the eight chapters lay bare (once again in Johnson's novel) the illusive character of the idea that it is possible to convey any objective image of reality, even within the first person narrative: the images we receive are deformed and altered by the deformed and deficient receptive skills of the narrative voices on the one hand, and the equally disabled language on the other. Moreover, Johnson would not have been himself had he not spoken in his own voice. Each old person's monologue is 21-pages long, apart from the House Mother's. She is allowed to speak for one page more, and on this last page, she is made to speak to the reader directly, in her own (or the author's own) voice:

> Thus you see I too am the puppet or concoction of a writer (you always knew there was a writer behind it all? Ah, there's no fooling you readers!), a writer who has me at present standing in the post-orgasmic nude but who still expects me to be his own words without embarrassment or personal comfort. So you see this is from his skull. It is a diagram of certain aspects of the inside of his skull! What laugh! (*House* 204)

Jonathan Coe argues that the implication here is a contradictory one: it is permissible to fictionalize, to make things up, but, apparently, only if you come clean about it in the end (25). And yet, as Johnson's own words make clear, there is actually no need to come clean about it, because "there's no fooling you readers" (qtd. in Coe 25). The novel features yet another characteristic of Johnson's later works: his fascination with old age and a growing awareness of the inevitability of the physical and mental degradation and destruction that is common to all people. This brings Johnson closer to Beckett again.

The reader is once more made very much aware that he or she is reading a book and is being addressed by the author in Johnson's sixth novel, *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry* (Introduction). Jonathan Coe describes Johnson's sixth novel as "a brilliant, fast-paced black comedy" and "the point at which

newcomers to B. S. Johnson are encouraged to start" (26). The novel tells the story of Christie Malry, a young accounts clerk at a confectionery factory in London. It is divided into five parts, each ending with a page of accounts in which Christie attempts to draw a parallel with life (Introduction).

Malry, frustrated by some petty injustices at the hands of society and, particularly, of the authorities, invents a unique way of compensating for the harm he incurs: he develops a system of moral double-entry bookkeeping. For every offence society commits against him, he feels an urge to react in order to balance the moral books. He does so by committing some – at first minor – offences against the social order and the authorities. At first, Malry's grievances are small, so the payment he demands is correspondingly modest: resenting the presence of an office block that stands in his way, Christie responds by scratching a line down its stone facade with the edge of a coin. Specific lambasting from the Chief and assistant Accountants is met with the Undertaker's bill being unpaid, while the unpleasantness of Malry's employer, Mr Wagner, is offset by stealing stationery items from the office. However, as the novel proceeds, Malry's grievances and claims become more and more absurd and disproportionate to the offences he himself experiences. Thus, the failure to give socialism its due or to give Malry's girlfriend Shrike a chance commensurate with her abilities elicit more decisive action, such as the planting of a bomb outside the offices of the Collector of Taxes or the killing of 20,000 people by poisoning their water supply.

Soon it becomes apparent that Malry's ingrained sense of personal and social injustice is impossible to mollify. Instead, the author, all of a sudden, appears at the level of the main character and interferes abruptly by imposing terminal illness on Malry:

> 'Christie' I warned him, 'it does not seem to me possible to take this novel much further. I'm sorry'. 'Don't be sorry' said Christie, in a kindly manner. We don't equate lengths with importance, do we? And who wants long novels anyway? Why spend all your spare time for a month reading a thousand-page novel when you can have a comparable aesthetic experience in the theatre or cinema in only one evening? The writing of a long novel is in itself an anachronistic act: it was relevant only to a society and a set of social conditions which no longer exist. (*Christie Malry* 165)

As we can see, Johnson was not prone to compromising or abandoning his ideas. The consequence of such assumptions for the novel is that the lump Christie discovers in his body develops rapidly and leads to his death several pages later.

To sum up, we can conclude that the works of B. S. Johnson belong to the most avant-garde currents in the history of twentieth-century literature. Johnson himself, like his great predecessor and master Samuel Beckett, was a writer who believed in the possibility of attaining his ultimate objective – the truth – and the

medium he employed to convey the truth was literature, specifically the novel. Johnson's belief was that the author, in order to be authentic and create trustworthy literature, needs to reject old, clapped-out conventions and literary techniques and create new ones. His own works are the best evidence of the process of seeking and articulating the truth, the process that resulted in subversive (cut-outs in the pages of *Albert Angelo*, authorial interventions in *Travelling People*, *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry* and *House Mother Normal*), unrestricted (loose pages in *The Unfortunates*) and sometimes transgressive forms (the cinematographic simultaneity in *Albert Angelo* or *House Mother Normal*).

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"Smilers, Defilers, Reekers and Leakers"[1] – Dogs as Tools of Subversion and Transgression in Short Stories by Edgar A. Poe, Mark Twain and Ambrose Bierce

Abstract: In this article I will analyze three satirical stories written by Edgar A. Poe, Ambrose Bierce and Mark Twain. The common denominator of them is the presence of dogs and their eccentric subject matter and controversial narrative strategies have for many decades been treated as a major offense against the standards of literary taste. A closer analysis of such thought-provoking and critically underrated tales as "Toby Dammit," "Oil of Dog" or "A Dog's Tale" makes it evident that their powerful effect is possible thanks to transgression and subversion of generic expectations and aesthetic norms as well as social, political and religious issues that dominated the public discourse in the nineteenth-century United States. Furthermore, what might be perceived as a temporary rebellion or a mere irregularity in the literary oeuvre of three unquestionably canonical nineteenth-century writers is, in fact, a conscious, if risky, attempt on the part of Poe, Twain and Bierce to offer meaningful diagnoses of a society whose values and behaviours appear to be even more disgusting and irrational than the bizarre and often highly disturbing plotlines and extreme experiences in the fictitious worlds they created.

> *Autobiography's urge toward self-knowledge is mirrored by satire's urge to make people know themselves, tempered by the ironic awareness that self-deception is the pervasive human disease.* (New 513)

In his study of subversions and scandals in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century art, Anthony Julius offers the following comment:

> To describe an artwork as 'transgressive' is to offer it a compliment. . . . It is successor to the Romantic ideology of the artist as genius, a rulebreaker indifferent to art's constraints. . . . The transgressive also has a certain political flavour, opposing the stereotypical and the self-enclosed, and generating the 'open' and the 'hybrid.'. . . Boundary-breaking is to be admired; it resonates with everything that is fluid, fresh, unencumbered, mobile – and 'cool.' (19–20)

[1] The first five words of the title come from Ambrose Bierce's openly derisive, though suitably euphemistic description of dogs: "Snap-dogs, lap-dogs, always-on-tap-dogs / Smilers, Defilers / Reekers and Leakers" (qtd. in R. Morris 15).

Boundaries symbolize the conservative, the stale, the conventional. In transgressing them, art violates its own rules, plays with the expectations and beliefs of the spectators, and is occasionally considered offensive and/or intolerable by the state. Paradoxically enough, modern-day audiences expect to be scandalized and taboo-breaking has become a convention itself: a desirable promoting strategy which ensures topicality while at the same time it attracts critical interest and acclaim.

Literature of the last two centuries has not been devoid of similar perils and temptations. As is the case with art, the nagging question remains as to what extent literature is capable of genuinely changing the world. Furthermore, the cultural and historical contexts in which transgression occurs, or is perceived as such, need examining as well as the correlation of the subversive qualities of literature with specific literary genres. In other words, transgression is not always a function of the writer's innovative approach or conscious strategy, and there can be no unanimous and permanent agreement as to which works of literature "deserve" to be called subversive and precisely what criteria should be applied in the process of classifying them as such. The inherent ambiguity of subversive and/or transgressive literature complicates matters even further. A typical lexicon entry defines subversion as either an "activity undermining government" or "overthrow of something: the destruction or ruining of something" ("Subversion") whereas transgression involves "action violating law or code, commission of wrongs, or overstepping limit" ("Transgression"). Indeed, the moral argument has often been used to denigrate or even condemn various writers' attempts at experimenting with new or controversial forms and subject matter.

Taking into account the lexical subtleties mentioned above, the satire genre would seem subversive by definition. After all, it "derides": it "uses laughter as a weapon, and against a butt that exists outside the work itself" (Abrams 275). While exposing "both human and institutional failures . . . greed, self-indulgence, drunkenness, incompetence, hypocrisy, intolerance, corruption, excesses, or partisanship" (L. Morris 377), the concerned satirist hopes to be able to inspire changes in the imperfect world, encouraging reform of not only the faulty sociopolitical structures, but also the very modes of thinking prevalent in the given society. As Brian Connery and Kirk Combe remind us, "Reading satire is doubly perilous, for satirists specialize in demolition projects. The one thing we know about satire is that it promises to tell us what we do not want to know – what we may, in fact, resist knowing" (1). The disturbing effect produced by various satirical pieces does not necessarily result solely from the controversial subject matter or stylistic exaggerations. Ultimately, it is the fact they constitute an idiosyncratic mode of mirroring and diagnosing the social reality, and expressing dissent (Quintero 1) that unsettles the reader and sometimes even energizes him or her into genuine action.

In what follows I will discuss some of the ways in which the unorthodox and oftentimes disturbing presence and the ambivalent status of dogs in selected pieces of satirical prose contribute to their subversive potential while at the same time leading to considerable interpretive problems and inviting questions about the reception of the stories by contemporary readership. The works in question are "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" by Edgar Allan Poe, "Oil of Dog" by Ambrose Bierce and "A Dog's Tale" by Mark Twain. My justification for putting these three stories together is simple enough. Firstly, they belong to the satire genre and include dog-related themes. Secondly, they were written by eminent nineteenth-century American writers whose literary legacy continues to influence contemporary tastes and remains relevant to mass culture. It should also be emphasized that the tales have received far less critical attention than their authors' other literary works and that the interest from both reviewers and scholars has, rather frustratingly, gravitated towards the field of biographical criticism. Furthermore, there is a definite connection between the authors of the stories, with Bierce often being termed Poe's successor or imitator, and his brand of satire occasionally juxtaposed or contrasted with Twain's allegedly more good-natured humour. Last, but not least, even if the literary reputation of the three American writers suffered as a result of venturing into a traditionally less respected and frequently misunderstood genre, they undoubtedly excelled at it, experimented with its various brands and used it as a convenient platform for exposing and scorning the vices of the increasingly materialistic, self-absorbed and complacent society of their times.

A Dog's Life

An even cursory perusal of *The Wordsworth Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* reveals humans' longstanding ambivalence towards dogs ("Dog," *Wordsworth* 348–52). In fact, the majority of dog-related English phrases and colloquialisms bring negative associations with filth, degradation, worthlessness and crime, e.g., "a dirty dog," "to be in the doghouse," "love me love my dog" "dogs of war," "throw it to the dogs," "to die like a dog," "to go to the dogs," "dog-cheap" or "not to have a word to throw at a dog." Dogs have always been cherished for their loyalty, yet at the same time despised for their servility, dependent on their masters, essentially devoid of autonomy, passive and inferior.

American literature abounds in tales of dogs. At times they can be pretty disturbing. Harlan Ellison's "A Boy and His Dog," a 1969 short story, comes to mind in particular. In it Blood, a genetically mutated dog, functions as a telepathic pimp and a misanthrope who likes to comment upon the stupidity of humans. The end of the story suggests that the protagonist cooked his girlfriend

in order to feed his loyal dog companion: an idea that might come as a shock, but which, in my opinion, is merely yet another instance of escalating misogynistic fantasies, made even more unpalatable in terms of reception precisely due to the presence of the canine component. An almost equally disturbing take on the ubiquity of "boy and his dog" stories in American culture has been offered by Eric Tribunella, who claims that the strong, affectionate relationships represent "a form of childhood sexuality that is often overlooked as such" (152).

Dogs in the above-mentioned tales by Poe, Bierce and Twain are integrated into the narrative in various ways, performing different roles and serving different agendas. It would seem that the varying levels of spite for those severely underrated creatures in the three writers' fictitious worlds pretty much reflect their despicable status in the real world and in this sense the creators help perpetuate the values cherished by the communities they indirectly attack.

"Never Bet the Devil Your Head" and Dogged Morality

While commenting on his short story "Berenice" in a letter to T. W. White, Poe announced the intention to express in writing "the ludicrous heightened into the grotesque: the fearful coloured into the horrible: the witty exaggerated into the burlesque: the singular wrought out into the strange and mystical" (qtd. in Meindl 47). Even more interestingly, he promised that he would not avoid the risk of going to "the very verge of bad taste" (47). "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" (1841), subtitled "A Tale With a Moral," certainly meets the criteria of a bizarre, at times hilarious, but mostly enigmatic grotesque genre, and it has been interpreted predominantly as a satire on Poe's contemporary literary establishment, especially the influential transcendentalists. Specifically, Poe is said to be "preoccupied or even obsessed by what he sees as transcendental hucksterism and what transcendentalism represents in a critical perspective: hypocrisy, callousness, and egotism" (Eisenhauer xi).

The narrator, who claims to be the author of the tale, responds to literary critics' accusations that his stories are not didactic enough and, having quoted profusely from various classics, proceeds to describe the short and rather violent life of Toby Dammit, his companion. It is, he assures the imagined community of readers (including reviewers), "a history about whose obvious moral there can be no question whatever, since he who runs may read it in the large capitals which form the title of the tale" ("Never Bet" 414).

Much in the spirit and tradition of tall tales, Toby Dammit is described as an unusually wicked person who, even as a pre-toddler, abuses alcohol, is a womanizer and grows up to become an obsessive gambler, but only in the

rhetorical sense: he often makes bets and at some point starts to use the expression "I'll bet the devil my head" practically in every situation. The narrator in a matter-of-fact way expresses the conviction that Toby's vices should be ascribed to the improper way in which his mother flogged him, namely using left hand.[2] He also claims that he tried to persuade Dammit to drop his bad habits but to no avail.

One day, while on an excursion, the two men come across a bridge which is divided by a turnstile. Dammit bets the devil his head that he will leap over it and the narrator immediately notices a tiny old man who actually encourages Dammit to go through with the challenge. Unfortunately, Toby falls backwards during the jump and it turns out it is because he hit a horizontally placed sharp iron bar and got decapitated. The old man, who happens to be a devil, collects Toby's head. Since no one is inclined to pay funeral expenses, the narrator decides to sell his mutilated body "for dog's meat" (419).

In his study of subversion in modern literature, Keith Booker expresses a conviction that "to be politically effective, any literary transgression must have a strong communal element" as well as specific political and social targets (208). Seen from this perspective, Poe's satirical stories do not seem particularly "social" or focused on singular objects of ridicule. In fact, the author himself claimed that "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" was "a mere Extravaganza levelled at no one in particular, but pitting right and left at things in general" (Barger 412), with the targets ranging from homeopathists to literary hacks.

Whereas the familiar "bargain with the devil" motif carries the story and provides a necessary, if minimal, dose of suspense, the situational burlesque and enigmatic quality of the characters make it impossible to concentrate on the narrative and/or treat it seriously. The absurdity and improbability of the story are particularly striking as far as the unlucky protagonist is concerned. What the narrator observes about Toby's personality is reduced to his being nasty, poor and parsimonious (because of being poor). Paradoxically, much more can be inferred as far as the narrator's biased, growingly judgmental attitude towards Toby is concerned. He shows no empathy for his rude companion, cynically likens Toby's poverty to a vice and seems to be content with his imminent doom. In short, as Eliot Glassheim suggests, the narrator "shows himself to be a pompous, obtuse moralizer" (44).

The effect of defamiliarization is certainly intensified by the narrator's constant references to the peculiar, dog-like behaviour on the part of the obsessive gambler, such as "He was a sad dog, it is true, and a dog's death it was

[2] In Mary Grenander's opinion, the passage about corporal punishment brings immediate associations with Jonathan Swift's "A Tale of a Tub," where Swift's persona writes: "Last week I saw a woman flayed, and you will hardly believe how much it altered her persona for the worse" (qtd. in Grenander 132).

that he died; but he himself was not to blame for his vices" (414), "Nothing would serve him but wriggling and skipping about under and over every thing that came in his way" (416) and

> [a]t five months of age he used to get into such passions that he was unable to articulate. At six months, I caught him gnawing a pack of cards. At seven months he was in the constant habit of catching and kissing the female babies. At eight months he peremptorily refused to put his signature to the Temperance pledge. Thus he went on increasing in iniquity, month after month, until, at the close of the first year, he not only insisted upon wearing moustaches, but had contracted a propensity for cursing and swearing, and for backing his assertions by bets. (414)[3]

While discussing the merits of *Toby Dammit*, a film adaptation of "Never Bet the Devil Your Head," Christopher Sharrett treats the film as "Fellini's meditation on the erasure of the subject through the erasure of the subject through the erasure of the actor: that is, the end of the artist as manipulated figure subscribing to a 'corporate vision' of art" (124). Toby is "an actor without a voice" (129), "the emblem of failed signification" (129) and "a puppet, a functionary within the avenue of illusion" (131). Arguably, a similar process occurs in the literary original: Toby from the very beginning functions as a defective, fragmented character, deprived of his own voice and palpable identity, bound to disintegrate in a clever game of words.

The Impossibility of Story-telling

Several scholarly analyses of "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" concentrated on the more or less obscure references to the mid-nineteenth century literary life in the United States, a useful strategy for establishing the precise targets of Poe's taunts. Other investigative efforts aimed at locating the story within Poe's satirical oeuvre, especially in terms of obsessively recurring themes and motifs, e.g., body mutilations, for comic effect. Of equal interest, however, is that aspect of the story which enables reading it as a commentary on the absurdity and futility of both story-telling and story-interpreting, and in this sense Poe's "minor, farcical" tale (Joshi 170) transgresses the typical confines of the satire genre.

Since in his introductory remarks the narrator comments profusely on the issue of literary didacticism and the moral has already been included in the title of the story, one could reasonably argue that there is no point in telling the rest

[3] A detailed analysis of Toby's dog-like qualities and behaviours was offered by Eliot Glassheim, who went as far as to claim that Toby "is, in literal fact, a dog" (45).

of the tale. And indeed, what follows seems to be an almost gratuitous exercise in offending rules of narration and limits of plausibility. Furthermore, language itself "betrays" and undermines both the credibility of the narrator and the story, though at the same time linguistic puns and figures of speech employed by Poe are very effective in conveying its overall satirical purpose. To give a striking example, "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" heavily relies on such rhetorical devices as antonomasia, "a trope that involves the substitution of an epithet, a descriptive word or phrase, for a proper name or any common noun – or vice versa" (Zimmerman 136), and exemplum, "a cited example that may be either true or mythical; a story or anecdote cited to illustrate a moral or a doctrine" (Zimmerman 215). Amusingly enough, their presence constitutes a potential self-parody of Poe's abundant use of scientific jargon and obscure literary references:

> The truth is, there was something in the air with which Mr. Dammit was wont to give utterance to his offensive expression – something in his manner of enunciation – which at first interested, and afterwards made me very uneasy – something which, for want of a more definite term at present, I must be permitted to call queer; but which Mr. Coleridge would have called mystical, Mr. Kant pantheistical, Mr. Carlyle twistical, and Mr. Emerson hyperquizzitistical. ("Never Bet" 415)

In this rhetorical void, the main character is reduced to "now shouting out, and now lisping out, all manner of odd little and big words, yet preserving the gravest face in the world all the time" (416). With a considerable help from his "friend," the decisively unfriendly narrator, Toby has been deprived of convincing motivation; stripped down to clichés; made to look preposterous, disturbing, impenetrable and ultimately useless. Even his propensity for rhetorical bets, the very basis of the tale, is put into question by the narrator, who admits to being inefficient, possibly untrustworthy:

> With him the thing was a mere formula – nothing more. His expressions on this head had no meaning attached to them whatever. They were simple if not altogether innocent expletives – imaginative phrases wherewith to round off a sentence. But these are my own reflections and I am by no means sure that I am right in attributing them to him. (414)

As if to ridicule the notion that fiction is rich with ideas and thus worthy of interpretive efforts which, in turn, are perfectly legitimate, the narrator in "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" has the following comment to offer at the beginning of the tale:

> [I]t has been shown that no man can sit down to write without a very profound design. Thus to authors in general much trouble is spared. A novelist, for example, need have no care of his moral. It is there – that is to say, it is somewhere – and the moral and the critics can take care of themselves. When the proper time arrives, all that the gentleman intended, and all that

> he did not intend, will be brought to light, in the "Dial," or the "Down-Easter," together with all that he ought to have intended, and the rest that he clearly meant to intend: – so that it will all come very straight in the end. (413)

Poe had to be aware his story would baffle and mystify even his most cultivated, reference-catching readers. His taunt towards the critical establishment might be perceived as a symbolic act of shooting himself in the foot, yet it encourages uncomfortable questions concerning deeper intents and hidden agendas that are worth searching for and unearthing for the sake of the reading community. With the benefit of hindsight, one is almost tempted to ask whether "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" fully warrants the critical attention it has been accorded (regardless of how scant the attention may seem in comparison with the critical interest inspired by Poe's horror stories). Perhaps while trying to uncover the meaning of a work of literature, scholars are guilty of a similar transgression: that of seeing profundity and deliberateness in a story which may be characterized by neither.

"Oil of Dog" and Dogged Business

"Oil of Dog" (1890) belongs to *The Parenticide Club* cycle[4] of stories which have for many years been considered disgusting, unnecessarily brutal and devoid of any redeeming qualities. Roy Morris termed this dog-related effort a "hair-raising tale" (11) and added, in an exasperated tone: "The fact that these stories were intended to be – and are, in a somewhat grisly way – funny, makes them seem, if anything, even more terrible" (11). Clearly, the notion of black humour and its espousal of controversial topics has often provoked discomfort, rather than genuine amusement or serious analysis, from those critics who seem to have opted for the relatively safer territory of Bierce's war and supernatural tales.

The beginning of the story offers a representative introduction to Bierce's style and promises a crazy world in which all moral values are perverted or suspended, and murdering people and animals out of expediency, greed or pure sadism is treated as a perfectly understandable strategy:

> My name is Boffer Bings. I was born of honest parents in one of the humbler walks of life, my father being a manufacturer of dog-oil and my mother having a small studio in the shadow of the village church, where she disposed of unwelcome babes. In my boyhood I was trained to habits of industry; I not only assisted my father in procuring dogs for his vats, but was frequently employed by my mother to carry away the debris of her work in the studio. (427)

[4] The remaining three stories are "My Favorite Murder," "The Hypnotist" and "An Imperfect Conflagration." In each of them, the narrator's parents or close relatives die as a result of his outrageous actions.

However, on one occasion Boffer is followed by a suspicious constable and is forced to cast the body of a foundling into the cauldron in his father's oil factory. As a result, the father obtains oil of unusually fine quality and it occurs to him and his wife that they should think about "combining their industries" and start producing oil of babies. People living in the town are not enthusiastic about the possibility of "any further raids upon the population." Angered by the citizens' resolution, the parents get rid of them and prepare secretly to kill each other: the woman stabs her husband but he manages to drag her into the cauldron, in which both die. The narrator leaves the city, greatly disappointed with this "commercial disaster" and, apparently, remorseful because of his role in it.

Mary Grenander classified *The Parenticide Club* stories as absurd mimetic tales of action (80) and established that, in realizing his satirical vision, Bierce used primarily a reverse of genuine standards, hyperbolic exaggeration and understatement (131). The euphemistic way of telling the story seems to contribute most to its irresistibly comical effect. For instance, the final struggle between Boffer's parents is called by the narrator "a disagreeable instance of domestic infelicity" (430) and the fatal stabbing invites the following comment: "My father's breast and my mother's weapon showed evidences of contact" (430). In fact, it is precisely the incongruity between the narrator's eloquent – if somewhat pompous – diction and the horrific nature of the plotline that constitutes the principal source of humour. While commenting on Bierce's style, particularly in reference to his satirical stories, Martin Jay writes about

> the war between, on the one hand, his language – a language so savage that it is almost out of control, in which invective leads to vituperation and vituperation to frenzy; and, on the other hand, the forms he employs, whose tendency is to blunt, to efface, and to tolerate weakness. (213)

All in all, it seems that "Oil of Dog" relies on a risky, but effective coupling of style and content.

Bierce's choices of style and subject matter contribute a great deal to the sense of awkwardness and embarrassment on the part of the readers. His inverted tale of the rise and fall of a controversial business enterprise has even been termed "so outlandishly grotesque . . . that it makes one a little bit ashamed to laugh" (Quirk 143). Incidentally, Quirk's verdict helps understand why it took many decades to secure the sardonic author's literary reputation but does not seem entirely fair or accurate from the point of view of the expectations carried by the very convention Bierce used in his parricide cycle. The fictitious universe created by Bierce may be considered completely unrealistic and/or morally abhorrent, yet it rarely ventures beyond the generic boundaries of the grotesque:

> [N]otwithstanding the multiplicity of scholarly treatments of the grotesque, there exists a certain amount of agreement as regards its essential nature. The grotesque emerges as a tense combination of attractive and repulsive elements, of comic and tragic aspects, of ludicrous and horrifying features. . . . Without a certain collision of complicity between playfulness and seriousness, the grotesque does not appear to exist. (Meindl 14)

The remarks concerning the quality of Bierce's humour do not seem to do justice to his satirical stories either. For instance, Lee characterizes Bierce's humour as "heavy, crude, cruel, physically violent, almost universally misanthropic, but above all misogynous" (137–38), a perspective that makes sense, but imposes a dead-serious interpretation of "Oil of Dog" as primarily an expression of moralistic concerns. Ironically enough, Boffer Bings is a perfect product of both Victorian sentimentalism and the Gilded Age. Even though the story was treated by several critics as a defence of parenticide, on closer inspection it offers a portrayal of a loving, hard-working family. The narrator repeatedly refers to one of his parents as "my dear mother," whose "holy influence" (429) helped him avoid the temptations of youth. Unfortunately, a minor mishap on the part of the narrator leads to the destruction of the Puritan work ethos and the holy familial bonds: values whose importance seems to overshadow the complicit role of the local church, authorities and ordinary citizens in tolerating such crimes as illegal abortions or stealing and murdering animals.

As is usually the case with the work of satirists, Bierce's tale has frequently been viewed in terms of his personal life and experiences. To give a typical example of such biographical fallacy, Jay claims that in *The Parenticide Club* stories Bierce "imitates in overt action the kind of psychic tensions in family life that alienist psychoanalysts would later describe" (216–17), whereas Tom Quirk seems to be torn between the constructedness of the fictitious world offered by Bierce and the influence of the creator's life on the content of "Oil of Dog": "It is not at all clear . . . how much of his supposed bitterness was temperamental and how much contrived, and it is to overestimate the depth of his resentment" (116). On the other hand, Talley opts for a fairly pragmatic, middle-of-the-road approach which, in her opinion, allows for a more comprehensive take on Bierce's oeuvre. Talley uses a post-Freudian perspective to account for the recurrent themes of family violence and parricide in Bierce's short stories, claiming that *The Parenticide Tales* "arguably contain both conscious satirical content and unconscious biographical content that should be considered together for a full understanding" (7). More specifically, "Oil of Dog" could then be described as a "depiction of a fictional child's struggle to resolve ambivalent emotions that reflect the heritage of Bierce's own childhood experiences" (8).

While a detailed consideration of the terms of the biographical fallacy debate would go beyond the scope of this paper, there is at least one good reason

why the extratextual factors could, and perhaps should, be taken into account in a thorough discussion of "Oil of Dog." Bierce's work as a journalist, lexicographer, short-story writer and satirist shows a remarkable unity as far as his worldview, topical preoccupations and stylistic idiosyncrasies are concerned. For example, for an analysis of the possible significance of dogs or, for that matter, of animals in general, in Bierce's stories, it does not seem entirely unreasonable to draw upon the biographical resources and *The Devil's Dictionary*, a product of Bierce's work as a columnist in various San Francisco newspapers and magazines. Berkove went as far as to propose that all satirical works by Bierce should be understood as "fictional counterparts to his attacks on social ills" (141) in the above-mentioned journalistic columns.

According to Roy Morris, Bierce hated dogs because of "their slavish need for affection and approval" (15), an assumption that could be easily countered, for instance, by claiming that the author of "Oil of Dog" hated women much more consistently or that he abhorred animals in general, even the domestic ones.[5] More convincing evidence of Bierce's cynicism and unease about the presence of canine quadrupeds in the world can be found in *The Unabridged Devil's Dictionary*, a collection of entries satirizing selected English words, where Bierce defines the dog as an obsolete, useless creature:

> It must seem to the Dog that the substances, methods and functions of nature are arranged with special reference to his needs, his capacities, his future. He can hardly help thinking himself gifted with peculiar advantages and inheriting the earth. Yet the rascal is an anachronism who exhausted his mandate ages and ages ago, and lags superfluous on the stage. He is a 'survival' who since the dawn of civilization has had no function and no meaning. Our love for him we have inherited along with many other instincts transmitted from our savage past. If there have never been a dog and one were created, we should fall foul of him with hard substances and a clamor of tongues. He would seem uglier than a reporter, and more hateful than a poet. (294)

An alternative, slightly simpler and more straightforward definition of the dog suggests that, according to Bierce, this animal is

> [a] kind of additional or subsidiary Deity designed to catch the overflow and surplus of the world's worship. This Divine Being in some of his smaller and silkier incarnations takes, in the affection of Woman, the place to which there is no human male aspirant. The Dog . . . toils not, neither does he spin, yet Solomon in all his glory never lay upon a door-mat all day long, sun-soaked and fly-fed and fat, while his master worked for the means wherewith to purchase the idle wag of the Solomonic tail, seasoned with a look of tolerant recognition. ("Dog," *Devil's Dictionary*)

[5] "A Cargo of Cat," a curious tall tale in which the death of thousands of cats is described in a detailed, almost sadistic manner, seems to be quite telling in this respect.

It is, therefore, hardly surprising that dogs in the story under analysis are used in a purely instrumental way and their role is reduced to being passive victims of human greed or medicinal ingredients. Funnily enough, however, it is the body of a human baby that turns out to be the agent of contamination and sets in motion an avalanche of gruesome events: a powerful reminder that the strategy of "subversive inversion" has been used consistently and fearlessly throughout the story.

"Oil of Dog" provides an apt illustration of the attitude described by Quintero, according to whom "satirists do not wither in despair but, on the contrary, feel compelled to express their dissent" (1). Bierce's story presents "a world not all that removed from the one we know" (Berkove 149): "This world is not wholly imaginary, except, perhaps, in the transparency of its hypocrisy" (148). It is precisely the familiarity of what Bierce satirizes that constitutes the most disturbing aspect of the story and attests to its endurance and popularity.

"A Dog's Tale" and Dogged Religiosity

"A Dog's Tale" was published in *Harper's Monthly* and as a pamphlet by the National Vivisection Society in 1903, with Mark Twain's approval, and as a book one year later (Mason 183). The story is told entirely from the point of view of Aileen Mavourneen, a dog who has no idea of the real significance of the events she describes in a detailed, passionate way. The first chapter of the narrative is devoted to Aileen's mother, who shows extraordinary skills in memorizing and imitating complicated words used by human beings. Aileen loves and admires her mother but is pretty soon sold and taken away to a new home, for reasons which she cannot comprehend. While living with the family, she saves her new owners' baby by dragging it away from the nursery in which a fire breaks out. Unfortunately, the baby's father mistakes Aileen's help for aggression. Beaten by its master, the dog spends much time hiding but comes back in favour once the truth about her heroism is revealed. Although Aileen is loved and praised by the family, the master does not hesitate to maim and kill her puppy during a biological experiment aimed at checking whether a specific brain injury would cause blindness. The puppy is buried in the family garden and Aileen naively believes it will "come up" like a flower. Having spent two weeks on the grave, Aileen is weakened with grief and close to death herself.

The very beginning of "A Dog's Tale" – "My father was a St. Bernard, my mother was a collie, but I am a Presbyterian" (351) – shows how confused and/or ignorant of the reality the naive dog-narrator is. In addition, it promises that the tone of the story will be invariably comical. However, what follows is an unrestrained, grim, melodramatic tale that offers no redemption for the abused

canine protagonist. The only humorous part of the tale is a result of exploiting "the gap between human speech and animal comprehension" (Messent 197). Thanks to listening intently to whatever is being said at home and in the Sunday school, the mother knows how to imitate "fine large words" (351), a skill that is greatly admired and makes other dogs envious. She earns the reputation of "the only cultivated dog" (352) in the community:

> She had one word which she always kept on hand, and ready, like a life-preserver, a kind of emergency word to strap on when she was likely to get washed overboard in a sudden way that was the word Synonymous. When she happened to fetch out a long word which had had its day weeks before and its prepared meanings gone to her dump-pile, if there was a stranger there of course it knocked him groggy for a couple of minutes, then he would come to, and by that time she would be away down wind on another tack, and not expecting anything; so when he'd hail and ask her to cash in, I (the only dog on the inside of her game) could see her canvas flicker a moment – but only just a moment – then it would belly out taut and full, and she would say, as calm as a summer's day, "It's synonymous with supererogation," or some godless long reptile of a word like that, and go placidly about and skim away on the next tack, perfectly comfortable, you know, and leave that stranger looking profane and embarrassed, and the initiated slatting the floor with their tails in unison and their faces transfigured with a holy joy. (352)

Parallels with the experience of taking part in the holy mass are unmistakable. In fact, details included in the clueless narrator's descriptions make it impossible not to take a religious perspective into account. Supporters of the biographical and/or historical paradigm in literary studies would be equally justified in choosing this investigative venue. After all, the well-known sayings attributed to Mark Twain, such as "Faith is believing what you know ain't so" or "If Christ were here now there is one thing he would not be – a Christian," speak volumes about his attitude towards organized religion, and some of his essays and works of fiction, e.g., *The Mysterious Stranger* or *Letters from the Earth* (both published posthumously), only confirm his tendency to ridicule the principles of Christianity.

Aileen's mother is a dog version of a priest, and a great pretender to boot. She obviously benefits from her privileged status as a canine intermediary, always ready to ridicule the "sceptics," to brand them publicly as stupid and unworthy. The dogs, in turn, behave like the faithful who are either not interested or unable to interpret or question the canine "Gospel." Clueless, but in awe, they follow their "spiritual leader" blindly. Mob mentality is for them a guarantee of not getting in trouble, its mechanism all the more depressing since it hinges upon all things spiritual.

But false religiousness seems to be a minor target in "A Dog's Tale." The notion that the afterlife will somehow compensate for the tribulations of earthly life (an option available only to humans in Twain's story), and that because of

that vision of bliss creatures should humbly accept whatever fate has in store for them, proves disastrous in the case of the narrator-protagonist. The teachings of Aileen's mother inculcate in her young, unsuspecting mind the belief that humility and passive acceptance are inherently good and thus constitute the only natural response to whatever Providence might have decreed:

> When I was well grown, at last, I was sold and taken away, and I never saw her [my mother] again. She was broken-hearted, and so was I, and we cried; but she comforted me as well as she could, and said we were sent into this world for a wise and good purpose, and must do our duties without repining, take our life as we might find it, live it for the best good of others, and never mind about the results; they were not our affair. She said men who did like this would have a noble and beautiful reward by and by in another world, and although we animals would not go there, to do well and right without reward would give to our brief lives a worthiness and dignity which in itself would be a reward. (353)

The consistently used anthropomorphism whereby human motivations and view of the world are attributed to an animal produces a highly ironic outcome. Unconditional trust and obedience: qualities which are demanded from the faithful but which can also be perceived as symptoms of passivity and fear, bring about a tragic conclusion for Aileen and her puppy. Had she been less gullible and humble, she would have been able to save her offspring and herself. An additional irony consists in the fact that dogs in Twain's fictitious universe prove to be much less beastly and much more moral than their human owners.

As far as the reception of the controversial story by Twain's contemporaries is concerned, "A Dog's Tale" was often termed charming, sentimental and extremely moving but treated mainly as an indictment of vivisectionism. "Of course, sentiment is not argument," a reviewer from *Charleston Sunday News* wrote, somewhat dismissively (Budd 541). Others referred to "a charming blend of humour and pathos" and "one of the best dog stories" (Budd 541), or conversely, claimed "it is not a story at all, but an anti-vivisectionist tract" (541). A different tone can be found in the review published anonymously in the "Novels" section of 1905 *Saturday Review*, especially since an attempt is made at offering a more formal analysis of Twain's work: "Mark Twain has spoiled the effect of a story designed to protest against scientific cruelty by very tedious and pointless jocularity at the outset" (Budd 541–42). The reviewer criticizes "unreal devices" (such plot points as the vivisection of the puppy whose mother rescued the owner's kid) and concludes the rather harsh assessment with the following parting shot: "Mr Smedley's four illustrations show more understanding of dogs than is to be found in the text, which will only appeal to sentimentalists" (Budd 542). To sum up, no comment was made about the religious dimension of the story, the accusation of humanity and its gullibility. The reviewers play a safe game: they content themselves with pinpointing the

more or less obvious weaknesses of Twain's tale, while refusing to touch upon its most explosive aspect.

What such modern-day scholars as Peter Messent or James Cox seem to have in common is their lack of inclination to dwell on the antireligious message of Twain's story. Curiously enough, their remarks are to a large degree reminiscent of the objections cited above. In particular, their criticism tends to be focused on the formulaic, Victorian, "cloying" sentimentality and predictable representations of gender (Messent 194, 195). Cox also classifies the story in the "sentimental category" and "more or less nauseating short fiction" (265). By contrast, Peter Stoneley argues stories such as "A Dog's Tale" "are conveniently dismissed as the sentimental effusions of an aged and lonely man" (104), and Leland Krauth expresses the conviction that

> to become sentimental in order to drive home a moral point is, for Mark Twain, neither a lapse, nor an aberration, nor a failing of old age: it is a fundamental gesture in his writing. It occurs in his best fiction as well as his strongest polemical essays. (38)

A different point of departure is adopted by Mary Henninger-Voss, who firmly locates Twain's story in the historical and literary context of the era, noticing that animals as first-person narrators started to be used "most heavily and effectively after 1870, after the conventions of the domestic ethic of kindness were fully articulated" (349).

Similarly to Poe's and Bierce's stories, Twain's work has often been commented upon and assessed through the lens of biographical criticism. In a typical example of such a tendency, Kristin Brown asks rhetorically: "[W]hy should Samuel Clemens have been in a humorous mood, faced with bankruptcy, the death of a child, and his wife's terminal illness?" On the other hand, taking into account Twain's very high public profile and mainstream recognition, and the all-encompassing, effusive praises such as Faulkner's "the father of American literature," it is actually quite surprising that the humorist's rebellious streak has continued to provide a viable scholarly perspective in the more recent decades.

The familiar "writer-as-rebel" meme has been used in connection with Twain's oeuvre by numerous academics and reviewers, except that the reliance on the notion of "a sanctioned rebel,"[6] who is capable of outraging a community, albeit within acceptable limits, has gradually given way to either a more thorough exploration of Twain's hitherto underappreciated darker satires or to more raced and gendered readings of his work in general. Bruce Michelson, in particular, draws attention to the "more subversive and anarchist dimensions" of Twain's works, claiming that the wilder, more outrageous aspect of his humour

[6] A conscious reference to Judith Fetterley's essay on the transformation of Tom Sawyer.

has been systematically neglected, and calls Twain "the best escape artist in the American canon," someone who breaks the rules instead of conforming to them (233). In a similar vein, Peter Messent concentrates on the "generic instabilities in Twain's texts" (19) and argues that the emphasis on "such instability, incongruity, and shifting perspective, provides a paradigm for Twain's work as a whole" (2). Such collections of Twain-related essays as *Constructing Mark Twain: New Directions in Scholarship* or *A Historical Guide to Mark Twain* (published in 2001 and 2002, respectively), demonstrate the wish to capture the author's life and work in all of their complexity and seem to augur more "revisionist" attempts in the near future. In the case of an author whose humour "subvert[s] the expectations of subversion" (Brykman) and who is difficult to place in the American literary tradition (Oggel 48), the scenario for constant critical reassessment sounds entirely plausible.

Conclusion

In juxtaposing Ashley Tauchert's pronouncement that transgression "has become a critical and cultural icon of radical nonconformity, an unvoiced insistence that the proper role of the intellectual is resistance" against "oppressive boundaries" (2) with Keith Booker's notion that transgressive literature "works more subtly, by gradually chipping away at certain modes of thinking that contribute to the perpetuation of oppressive political structures" (4), one arrives at a fairly accurate assessment of the literary effort by Edgar Allan Poe, Ambrose Bierce and Mark Twain. Often labelled iconoclasts, rebels and nonconformists, the above-mentioned creators were charged a rather exorbitant price for exceeding boundaries, norms and expectations. Not surprisingly, but rather disappointingly, even nowadays critical attention tends to concentrate on those literary achievements of Poe, Bierce and Twain that are easier to categorize and assess, and that do not challenge the dominant social order in such a blatant fashion.

A more detailed examination of "Never Bet the Devil Your Head," "Oil of Dog" and "A Dog's Tale" makes it possible to suggest that they exhibit a level of ambiguity and a dose of bitterness rarely encountered in mainstream American literature. However, those same properties have been responsible for either lukewarm or distrustful, or downright hostile, responses of the nineteenth-century reading public. In retrospect, one can argue that even if the three authors' potent mixture of cynicism and idealism could not radically change the world, it at least retains the ability to attract the attention of contemporary readers and provoke questions about the nature and the limits of cultural subversion in the societies which have more often than not refused to appreciate its goals and achievements.

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Great Expectations: Incest and Incompleteness in Kathy Acker's *Blood and Guts in High School*

Abstract: Often situated as a radical response to the late 1970s New York punk scene, the work of American writer Kathy Acker leverages an array of subversive literary techniques to actively interrogate extremely uncomfortable social terrain: profound violence against women, physical and emotional abuse, incest, disease and severe neglect. Many of her protagonists navigate through a continual proliferation of atrocities. Yet rather than situate her characters as victims, Acker instead inverts prescribed social scripts and proactively constructs narrative webs of deeply embedded critiques of patriarchal and sexual oppression.

By deploying a vast repertoire of forms – theatrical dialogues, drawings, dream maps, blatant plagiarism of canonical figures (e.g., Hawthorne, Mallarmé, Céline), fake translations – Acker paints a vivid and inventive picture of the apparatuses of control and manipulation, aggression and alienation. This essay seeks to examine how applications of logician Kurt Gödel's incompleteness theorem and cultural critic Nick Mansfield's ideas about "masochism as a theatrical space of power" elucidate Acker's watershed novel *Blood and Guts in High School* and examine the novel's critique of social and sexual power.

1. Prelude to a Kiss

Rarely in the landscape of American literature – or anywhere else really – has profound violence against women, physical and emotional abuse, abortion, incest, disease, pedophilia, severe neglect and terrorism been such a steady source of literary sustenance. But in the work of Kathy Acker, this is exactly the terrain where she situates her books. In novel after novel, her protagonists navigate through a continual proliferation of atrocities. Yet rather than posit her characters as victims, Acker aims to invert accepted social scripts and proactively constructs narrative webs of embedded critiques and deliberate provocation.

And critiques of what exactly? Critics like Catherine Rock or Susan E. Hawkins suggest Acker aims squarely at patriarchal and sexual oppression; Carla Harryman considers how Acker's narratives reclaim power through transgressive language and structure; Karen Brennan argues for a more nuanced (and somewhat ironic) inversion of a Freudian Electra complex; Michael Clune

sees Acker's use of incest as an extension of anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss's work on societal incest taboos, linking it with economic relations. What is clear is that Acker deploys a vast repertoire of forms – theatrical dialogues, drawings, dream maps, blatant plagiarism of canonical figures (e.g., Hawthorne, Mallarmé, Céline), fake translations – and, in this sense, she paints a vivid and inventive picture of the apparatuses behind control and manipulation, aggression and alienation.

While I find aspects of these critics' remarks helpful in understanding Acker's work, often these critics fall to what statistician Nate Silver calls "recency bias": allowing too narrow a scope or time-frame to deduce information from a given object of study. What I am looking to examine is how Acker's work grows out of the particularly *literary* history of masochism, and, moreover, how cultural critic Nick Mansfield's ideas about "masochism as a theatrical space of power" elucidate Acker's *Blood and Guts in High School*.

No critics have suggested that Acker's work is not provocative, but what we need to consider here is the question – provocative to what end? How or in what ways is Acker successful in reframing the issues of violence and oppression?

2. Is It "Incest" Incest?

Kathy Acker's watershed 1978 novel *Blood and Guts in High School* has become an icon for punk aesthetics, postmodern fiction, post-feminism, anti-feminism; an object of wonder; an object of deep disdain and disgust. Ostensibly, the novel follows the life of Janey Smith, who, we are expected to believe, is:

1) a 10 year-old girl;
2) with Pelvic Inflammatory Disease;
3) in an incestuous relationship with her father while living in Mexico;
4) until she flees to New York;
5) where she is sold into slavery/prostitution via a Persian slave trader;
6) escapes to Tangiers, where she cavorts with an aging Jean Genet; and
7) eventually succumbs to cancer at the age of 12.

To be sure, the bare outline of the plot – to the extent there is one – suggests a harrowing tale. But this is hardly a victim narrative, and between the galleries of depravity Acker calculatingly places dialogical engagements with literary figures, both canonical and subversive, such as César Vallego, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Stephane Mallarmé, William Burroughs and Jean Genet, while deploying an array of narrative devices, theatrical and visual, to arrest and surprise the reader.

The novel begins with an explanation that frames the entire book:

> Never having known a mother, her mother had died when Janey was a year old, Janey depended on her father for everything and regarded her father as boyfriend, brother, sister, money, amusement, and father. (7)

With this opening, the reader is at once presented with the problem and promise of Acker's novel: a world where interpersonal relationships are fluid, conflated, incestuous, object-oriented and tautological.

By the next paragraph, we have learned Janey's father is trying to dump her so he can pursue Sally, a starlet; and within the mere space of three pages the book is broken up by a crude drawing of two exposed penises and paragraphs of prose into scripted dialogues (including stage directions) between Janey and her father:

> **Janey:** You told me that you were just friends like me and Peter (*Janey's stuffed lamb*) and you weren't going to sleep together. It's not like my sleeping around with all these art studs: when you sleep with your best friend, it's really, really heavy. (9)

The scene begins what Catherine Rock describes as a "coupling of the debased and the delicate" (208). Janey is depicted as both very sexually aware ("sleeping around with all those art studs") and childishly unable to comprehend the seriousness of the situation ("when you sleep with your best friend, it's really, really heavy").

As Kathy Hughes suggests in her essay "Incest and Innocence," "The innocent, vulnerable request of a little girl who asks to sleep in her parent's bed for security and snuggling takes on a whole new meaning with Janey and exemplifies the dichotomy Rock sets up" (123). Before her father leaves for his date with Sally the starlet, he behaves like a loving father: he promises Janey he will wake her up when he comes home, calls her "sweetie" and says "yes" when she asks if she can "crawl into bed and sleep with him" (Acker 12). But the brashness of Acker's tone tips off the reader that Janey is not going to get the tenderness, consideration or security she is asking for.

Hughes contends that Acker's choice of Janey's age is part of "a challenging aesthetic, an irony as morbidly humorous as it is heartbreaking" (122). While I would agree that irony is an active part of Acker's work, I am unconvinced that Janey's age is "heartbreaking," in large part because Acker clearly has no interest in constructing a mimetic representation of a child. Acker favours severity over subtlety, and making Janey cruelly young initially forces the reader to take note. However, it is not a particularly bold or inventive gesture. It is a simply one of the more deplorably common manifestations of incest: Janey as character and placeholder must be young, because familial sexual abuse and incest typically imply childhood and youth. Moreover, unlike a novel such as Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, Acker's Janey does the majority of

narrating, and, quite simply, we hear her "voice" more directly and explicitly. Acker refuses to allow Janey to function simply as a passive victim, and regularly reminds the reader that mimesis is not her aim. For example, when discussing something as sensitive as an abortion, Janey observes that "[t]hey upset the hormonal system: the hormones send out many more eggs to compensate. They leave gaping holes in the womb and any foreign object that nears these holes can cause infection" (34). This kind of clinically precise, emotionally detached language is in no way typical of any ten year-old, and would fall more plausibly into the purview of adulthood.

What is more, her exchanges with her father are not static perpetrator-victim dynamics and result in empty deflections:

> **Janey** *(now the rational tone)***:** But you might leave me.
> **Father** (*silent*) (9),

a surprising accusation that Janey dominates her father: "You've completely dominated my life . . . for the last nine years and I no longer know who's you and who's me" (12), physically painful sex between them: "[I]t hurts her like hell 'cause of her Pelvic Inflammatory Disease" (10), and Janey oscillating between behaving coldly rational and feeling deeply hurt. Susan E. Hawkins writes that

> Janey, as an incest victim, blames herself for her father's indifference and thus can't handle Johnny's romantic interest in the starlet. Conversely, Johnny's attachment to Janey and his need to free himself of it sound absurdly like the emotional struggles disenchanted spouses experience in their attempts to leave a marriage made unhappy through their own midlife crises. (646)

Her father exits and Janey seeks counsel from Johnny's friend, Bill, who also sexually abused Janey. Bill tells Janey that she has "dominated [Johnny's] life since your mother died and now he hates you. He has to hate you because he has to reject you. He has to find out who he is" (11).

The absurdity of these statements, which Susan E. Hawkins alludes to and Karen Brennan takes a step further, is centred on their Freudian implications. Brennan writes that "Bill's psychoanalysis refigures the family roles by casting Janey as the overbearing mother and her father as the daughter/son on the threshold of the Oedipal stage. The father-daughter relationship, for Bill, is really a son-mother relationship" and turns the Freudian theory upside-down and inside-out (258). Moreover, Brennan's analysis of the drawing of two male figures with exposed penises (Acker 8) leads her to the conclusion that the headlessness of the father is symbolic of castration, and his nudity "transforms the daughter into a pornographer and the phallic father into a sex object, a

consumable product" (256), a contention I am not inclined to agree with, because, on balance, none of the figures in the novel feature heads: all figures in the novel are little more than their genitalia.

The father resents his daughter, who is only a child, for holding him back and smothering his identity the way the son resents the mother for the same reasons. But here Acker is inverting and conflating Freudian parent-child dynamics. Who is parent and who is child are fluid designations, or as Michael Palmer writes: "The self is assigned to others" (85). Janey tells Johnny that "[i]t was always me, my voice, I felt like a total nag; I want you to be the man" (12). This ten-year-old little girl believes that she has usurped her father's position and holds agency in the relationship. Janey also ironically tells Johnny, "When I first met you, it's as if a light turned on for me. You're the first joy I knew" (9), as if she almost pre-cognitively understands the inevitability of their relationship.

This fluidity of power coupled with a self-aware stylized theatricality is not simply an incestuous relationship, but grows out of an unavoidably masochistic one. When Richard von Kraft-Ebbing coined the term "masochism" in his book *Psychopathia Sexualis*, he declared the following: "I feel justified in calling this sexual anomaly 'Masochism,' because the author Sacher-Masoch frequently made this perversion, which up to his time was quite unknown to the scientific world as such, the substratum of his writings" (87). This definition is a complex gesture. At once, Kraft-Ebbing is quick to point out the "anomaly" and "perversion" of masochism, but yet with equal importance emphasizes that literature is the birthplace of it. Masochism might have existed as a social phenomenon long before *Venus in Furs*, but without it, it could not have been isolated; it is as though the condition and the literature came into being at the same instant.

As Nick Mansfield notes in *Masochism: The Art of Power*:

> Everywhere we look in the description of masochism . . . we find literature – in the style of the scientists' writing on the topic; in the behavior of masochists themselves, which is best described by images of the literary but also draws on literature in role-playing; and, of course, behind it all, the name of the condition itself was originally the name of a novelist. (3)

Moreover, from the outset, Acker is quick to conflate. After all, father is "sister, money, amusement" and – curiously and last of all – "father." Father is both a series of others and a tautology; masochistic and incestuous. Active and passive oscillate; victim and perpetrator become interchangeable.

Marianne Noble points out that "[m]asochism is a form of redefining and seizing power, a form available for women to exploit" (156). V. N. Smirnoff extends this thinking:

> Masochism is defiance. It is expressed through the masochist's apparently passive behavior, by his compliance with the inflicted pain and humiliation, by his claims of being enslaved and used. In fact, the masochist knows his position is simply the result of his own power: the power of endowing the executioner with the obligation with playing the role of the master, when indeed he is only a slave, a creation of the masochist's will. (688)

No doubt defiance is a fundamental part of Acker's project. Her punk aesthetic aims to provoke or incite, plants her characters and narratives in a kind of borderland, obvious and extreme places to react against any number of issues – patriarchy, capitalism, sexual limits, literary history, and so on.

Michael Clune in his article "Blood Money: Sovereignty and Exchange in Kathy Acker" claims that if Claude Levi-Strauss is correct, and the incest taboo encourages economic relations between different families and tribes through the exchange of women, then Acker's flouting of the taboo is a refusal of the principle of women as legal tender (496). Instead, Acker uses incest to visualize a truly free market, one in which "the weeds of sovereignty can be pulled out by their roots" (497). In this way, incest becomes an economic zero-sum, a tautology that subsumes transactional relations.

Certainly Acker's writerly animus is geared to react against comfortable or predictable social definitions and hierarchies, and so it is hardly surprising that she would set her sights on incest. Taking Levi-Strauss and Clune a step further, Kurt Gödel's incompleteness theorem[1] – which was built on the ideas inherent in the liar's paradox[2] – proves that, within any consistent system which contains arithmetic, there are logical propositions which are true but unprovable. Thus a wide swath of systems and structures necessarily contain aspects or portions which subvert their own foundational functioning. Seen in this light – rather than simply being reactionary – Acker exercises the foresight to engage structural inevitabilities, and her conflation of incest with masochism, active with passive, victim with perpetrator, person with commodity, patriarchy with capitalism, past with present, is simply a matter of course.

Given that Acker begins first with an act of provocation and follows by conflating her initial issues of critique, the acts of plagiarism that appear later – whether it involves the book report retelling of Hawthorne's *The Scarlett Letter* or aping Mallarmé's "A Throw of the Dice Never Abolishes Chance" – are the result of treating the past and the present as interchangeable. Moreover, it is another instance of the tautology inherent in masochism: Acker can take aim at her view of a patriarchal canon, but her reconstructions of texts shift her from marginalized victim to victor. Literary "fathers" become "money" in an

[1] A good resource and wider context for Gödel's work and its implications for non-mathematicians would be Rebecca Goldstein's *Incompleteness*.

[2] The most well-known example would be: "This sentence is false."

unstable transaction where the haloed primacy of the canon is subverted, while at the same time buttressing the complex web of allusion and interrogation Acker weaves.

3. Dreams for the Future

The opening scenes in *Blood and Guts in High School* provide one of the most solid frameworks of subject matter and tone throughout an entire novel I have ever seen although – strange to say this – the rampant sexuality and vulgarity become quite commonplace. By the time the scene below appears, the reader has seen words like "fuck," "cunt" or "abortion" so regularly they have been largely drained of resonance and are as surprising as beige walls:

> I was still desperate to fuck. Abortions make it dangerous to fuck again because they stretch out the opening of the womb so the sperm can reach the egg easily. They upset the hormonal system: the hormones send out many more eggs to compensate. They leave gaping holes in the womb and any foreign object that nears these holes can cause infection.
>
> I'm not trying to tell you about the weird rotgut parts of my life. Abortions are the symbol, the outer image, of sexual relations in this world. Describing my abortions is the only real way I can tell you about pain and fear . . . my unstoppable drive for sexual love. (34)

Acker offers formal variations with things like a map of Janey's dreams, and the section at the end called "The World," which uses a combination of image-symbols, phrases, and allusions to Hindu mythology, the Egyptian book of the Dead, or perhaps Jungian dream analysis, but the reader is just as likely to see a block of text like this:

> SUCK ME SUCK ME SUCK ME
> SUCK ME SUCK ME SUCK ME
> SUCK ME SUCK ME SUCK ME
> SUCK ME SUCK ME SUCK ME
> SUCK ME SUCK ME SUCK ME
> SUCK ME SUCK ME SUCK ME
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> SUCK ME SUCK ME SUCK ME
> SUCK ME SUCK ME SUCK ME
> SUCK ME SUCK ME SUCK ME
> SUCK ME SUCK ME SUCK ME
> SUCK ME SUCK ME SUCK ME
> SUCK ME SUCK ME SUCK ME
> SUCK ME SUCK ME SUCK ME
> SUCK ME SUCK ME SUCK ME
>
> sex is sweet. (110)

The character of Janey becomes what Mansfield would call "Total subjectivity," in which [she is] both a strongly centred ego and everything else, and where "sexual and aesthetic experiences are essentially the same thing" (42).

Certainly Acker's work is part of the punk scene of 1970s New York, one of the most well-known underground movements in the second half of the twentieth century. In some respects her Janey is treated as an economic product, e.g., via prostitution, but Acker herself also leverages her character as a kind of currency by hedging that the reader will in some way believe or endorse Acker's claims of Janey being a child. The premise of the novel depends on some amount of emotional engagement by the reader to separate it from the likes of a didactic, political essay. But little of what Janey actually says supports this idea of her being a child – rather quite the opposite. I would contend that Acker's conflations, while formally daring and interesting for their time, ultimately undermine her aims of social critique, because taken as a whole *Blood and Guts in High School* has almost no variation in tone or emotional volume. It is a kind of readerly cloying: if all I do is scream at the top of my lungs, chances are you are going to stop hearing me.

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Brief Interviews with Liminality: The Case of David Foster Wallace

Abstract: The beginning of the twenty first century can be described as a liminal period of discarding old interests and preoccupations in preparation for the arrival of something new. This feeling of standing on a threshold is also visible in literature where the growing impatience with the postmodern technique of formal play may result in the creation of a new kind of fiction. David Foster Wallace's collection of short stories *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* (1999) is a critique of the postmodern society and its representative literary form which not only convincingly argues that the formula of metafiction has been exhausted but also points to a possible way out of the postmodern impasse and to a different kind of writing. This essay outlines the major points of the critique of metafiction as presented by Wallace and analyses his work as an example of "new" metafiction. The new form – which both embodies and departs from the "old" metafictional devices – may be best approached via reference to the mechanism of trauma, particularly to its compulsive desire to repeat the "painful" metafictional event.

> *You are, unfortunately, a fiction writer. You are attempting a cycle of very short belletristic pieces, pieces which as it happens are not* contes philosophiques *and not vignettes or scenarios or allegories or fables, exactly, though neither are they really qualifiable as 'short stories' . . . How exactly the cycle's short pieces are supposed to work is hard to decide. Maybe say they are supposed to compose a certain sort of '*interrogation*' of the person reading them, somehow.* (Wallace, *Brief Interviews* 154)

According to one of the most general, and therefore perhaps one of the most applicable definitions, postmodernism is "an art of criticism, with no message other than the need for continuous questioning" (Russel qtd. in Hutcheon, *Poetics of Postmodernism* 42). This need for questioning is essentially the desire for transgression, for probing and crossing the existing boundaries and extending the horizon of human activity and thought: whether seen, á la Jean-François Lyotard, as the collapse of metanarratives, the Baudrillardian culture of simulacra, or, in Frederick Jameson's terms, as the late capitalist culture of depthlessness, postmodernism indeed has to do with questioning and boundary

breaking where the difference between reality and simulation is blurred and destroyed, and where all the existing divisions collapse. The postmodern subject, like the space she inhabits, is a fragmented one, lost in time and space, a mere effect of linguistic play and ideological manipulation. This postmodern condition is reflected in new art forms, such as metafiction, described by Patricia Waugh as a tendency within the novel which, although almost as old as the novel itself, gains momentum in postmodernism (5). According to Waugh, by playing with and disturbing the established literary conventions and narrative techniques, this self-conscious fiction works to destabilize the boundary separating reality from fiction and to make the reader aware of the fact that reality, like fiction, is written/constructed (5–7). Mirroring the general postmodern practice of boundary crossing and generic confusion, in metafiction "the boundaries between art and life, language and metalanguage, and fiction and criticism are under philosophical attack" (Currie 18). The transgressive attacks may, however, lead to a feeling of exhaustion which, contrary to John Barth's well-known statement which defines postmodernist literature as one of exhaustion (162), may be a cause for despair: unmasked as "empty signifiers" only, the postmodern subjects/writers may begin to feel a desire for something beyond the deconstructive gesture of metafictional questioning, for a new literary form which might better reflect the new sensibility.

David Foster Wallace is a contemporary American writer whose work, critically recognized as postmodern and metaficitional, represents the struggle to exceed the limits of postmodernism and of its literary equivalent. At the time of his death in 2007, Wallace was the author of two novels, three collections of short stories and an unfinished novel, *The Pale King*, all of which employ the devices universally identified as metafictional: his debut novel, *The Broom of the System* (1987), interrogates the distance that separates reality from fiction by presenting a protagonist who suspects she is not real; the title of his 1996 novel, *Infinite Jest*, is an intertextual reference to Yorrick from William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and also the title of a film which in the novel kills its viewers; and the stories collected in *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* (1999) use such metafictional techniques as direct references to the reader, authorial interventions and heterogeneity of mostly popular genres, such as quizzes and interviews. At the same time, however, Wallace protested against being called a postmodern writer; in fact, he protested against being classified in any of the existing categories. In an interview with Charlie Rose in 1997, Wallace stated: "I do not consider myself a postmodernist; I don't consider myself anything," and openly expressed his dissatisfaction with postmodernism as such:

> The problem is I think postmodernism has to a large extent run its course. The biggest thing for me that was interesting about postmodernism is that it was the first text that was highly self-conscious. Self-conscious of itself as text, self-conscious of the writer as persona, self-conscious about the effects that narrative had on readers. (Interview)

A tentative answer to the question why postmodernism has run its course may be reached through a reading of *Brief Interviews* as a self-conscious text – the textual quality pinpointed by Wallace as the key feature of postmodern literature, but used in the collection as the point of departure for a new, potentially post-metafictional kind of writing. The short stories attempt to critique the postmodern form by adopting the language of the form, therefore making it difficult to decide whether Wallace's book is a transgressive or liminal text and forcing the reader to speculate on the nature of transgression itself. Whatever the effect of the self-consciousness is, however, it seems to be directed no longer at the text itself, but rather at the reader, imagined here as not simply another textual artefact, but a living and feeling being whose corporeality has to be recovered from the layers of metafictional self-awareness.

Writing about postmodernism, Linda Hutcheon defends its claims by stating that "the new ideology of postmodernism may be that everything is ideological. But this does not lead to any intellectual or ideological impasse. What it does is to underlie the need for self-awareness" ("Poetics of Postmodernism" 211). It is this intellectual, ideological and literary impasse that *Brief Interviews* targets as the main problem with the postmodern impact on both literature and real life: the characters in Wallace's stories are highly self-conscious and aware of the conventions that govern the surrounding world, but instead of leading to self-revelation and self-improvement, perhaps even to a more ethical stance, this self-awareness immobilizes them, making them unable to begin any meaningful action or to establish any relationship. The effects of being too self-conscious and of knowing too well the social mechanisms are succinctly summarized in the story opening the collection entitled "A Radically Condensed History of Postindustrial Life":

> When they were introduced, he made a witticism, hoping to be liked. She laughed extremely hard, hoping to be liked. Then each drove home alone, staring straight ahead, with the very same twist to their faces.
> The man who had introduced them didn't much like either of them, though he acted as if he did, anxious as he was to preserve good relations at all times. One never knew, after all, now did one now did one now did one. (0)

The fact that the story begins on page 0 turns it into a kind of meta-story which, like an epigraph, frames all the other narratives and delimits their thematic focus. Consequently, alienation, passivity, emptiness, senselessness and lostness return in various guises in all the stories, dominated by the major themes of loneliness and manipulation: shut in the prison-house of the social semiotic system, the characters can be roughly divided into those who attempt to rebel against the depersonalizing social machine and those who use their knowledge about its mechanisms for their own advantage. Numerous

representatives of the latter group are found in the four chapters of the collection which appear under the same title of "Brief Interviews with Hideous Men" and which document various instances of misogyny, male condescension and manipulation. The interviews are conducted with various men coming from different parts of the United States – Illinois, Iowa, Pennsylvania, Georgia, etc. – and cover the period from 1994 to 1998. This attempt at representativeness makes the interviews resemble a survey where the respondents' views are to exemplify a certain universal tendency or condition. As Wallace specifies, in America this condition is expressed through "a certain sadness" which manifests itself as "a kind of lostness" felt by "a generation that has an inheritance of absolutely nothing as far as meaningful moral values" are concerned (qtd. in Max 54). The interview form used in Wallace's book is fundamentally dialogical, and this invitation to the reader to participate in the making of the text is enhanced by the absence of questions: presented with the answers only, the reader is to supply the questions on their own and thus join the writer in the production of the text not only on the level of content but also on the level of empathy and moral judgment. It does not seem accidental that the interviewed subjects are men and the interviewer is female; interestingly, the authorial references to the reader in the collection envisage them as a "she," suggesting thus that the public for which Wallace writes is predominantly female, or feminized and thus "sensitivized." The fact that women are deprived of the power to speak in the stories and that they are frequently victims of some traumatic experience is another example of the centrality of the ex-centric to postmodern texts, but it also directs the readers' attention to one of the most private of all spheres – the sexual relation – as representative of not only "the spiritual emptiness of heterosexual interaction in post-modern America" (Stein), but the emptiness of any social interaction whatsoever.

The stories of the "hideous men" circle around women as sexual objects, commodified, defined by and significant through their sexual value only. In the sexual conquest, every trick is allowed, including emotional blackmail, as is the case of one of the interviewed men who uses his deformed arm as a coy to seduce women. As he says, "[I]nside my head I don't call it the arm I call it the Asset" (*Brief Interviews* 82). Another justifies his sexual practices of bonding women by referring to the by-now popular knowledge of psychoanalysis which explains an adult's actions by his unhappy childhood and thus frees him from any moral responsibility: "[W]hat it is about is my desire symbolically to work out certain internal complexes consequent to my rather irregular childhood relations with my mother and twin sister" (104). Why the sexual relation is so important to the book's critical project might be explained by reference to Lacanian psychoanalysis, in which the love relation occupies a special place because of the role it plays in constituting the subject and in upholding the

coherence of the social symbolic field. "Sexuality is the domain in which we get most close to the intimacy of another human being" (Žižek, *Lacan*) and therefore it is also the meta-level at which the prevailing emptiness of postmodern human relations is most visible. The collection represents objectification and lack of reciprocity as the most damaging and universal results of the postmodern condition: we know what the other person desires, but, instead of sacrificing our interests for the sake of the other, we self-consciously use the other's desire for our own ends to narcissistically uphold our uncritically idealized image of ourselves. As one interviewee in *Brief Interviews* explains:

> [T]oday's postfeminist era is also today's postmodern era, in which supposedly everybody now knows everything about what's really going on underneath all the semiotic codes and cultural conventions, and everybody supposedly knows what paradigms everybody is operating out of, and so we're all as individuals held to be far more responsible for our sexuality, since everything we do is now unprecedentedly conscious and informed. (229)

Yet, as the collection shows, self-knowledge does not equal responsibility: we know the rules, we know the pseudo-scientific, politically correct "lingo" (as the hideous men are fond of repeating), and we know how not to be seduced by images, but we still nevertheless copy them. In this respect, Wallace's characters seem very similar to the postmodern cynic described by a contemporary Lacanian critic, Slavoj Žižek, who warns us that the cynical attitude of critical detachment from the ideological machine is, in fact, itself a product of ideology:

> [W]e are victims of authority precisely when we think we have duped it: the cynical distance is empty, our true place is in the ritual of obeying – or, as Kurt Vonnegut put it in his *Mother Night*: "We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be." (*Enjoy Your Symptom!* xxiii)

The protagonists of *Brief Interviews* know that they pretend, but they either do not know that they have become what they pretend to be or, if they do, they cannot find a way out. Again, the fact that interpersonal relations are presented in the collection as emptied of emotions and love seems important in the context of Lacan's statement that "he whom I suppose to know I love" ("God" 139), which binds love with revelation: it is the beloved who is taken to know the truth about the other and, if love disappears from the relation, so does the ontological support of the lover.

The theme of the desire to express the truth about oneself and the impossibility of doing so is the crucial recurring motif in the collection. In "On His Deathbed, Holding Your Hand, the Acclaimed New Young Off-Broadway Playwright's Father Begs a Boon," we encounter a dying man who decides to reveal the terrifying truth about himself, to confess that the relation with his son which has defined him for others is based on hatred, not on love, and to demand to be seen not as a father but as a man:

> Why does no one tell you? Why do all regard it as a blessed event? There seems to be almost a conspiracy to keep you in the dark. Why does no one take you aside and tell you what is coming? Why not tell you the truth? . . . That you are expected now to give up everything and not only to receive no thanks but to expect none? . . . that you will have no more life that is *yours*? . . . That your failure to cast yourself away and change everything and be delirious with joy at – that this will be judged. Not just as a quote unquote parent but as a man. Your human worth. (256–57)

As the title of the story indicates, the man's desperate attempts at self-revelation fail and the paternal role continues to define him even after his death. The impossibility of breaking through the linguistic wall of social roles and conventions is also presented in "The Depressed Person," which documents tedious and futile attempts of a woman to communicate her pain to her friends: "The depressed person was in terrible and unceasing emotional pain, and the impossibility of sharing or articulating this pain was itself a component of the pain and a contributing factor in its essential horror" (37). The knowledge of the impossibility of articulating the pain becomes the source of pain and necessitates recourse to other stories through which the depressed person's situation may be made clear to others:

> [T]he depressed person instead described circumstances, both past and ongoing, which were somehow related to the pain, to its etiology and cause, hoping at least to be able to express to others something of the pain's context, its – as it were – shape and texture. (37)

The depressed person is thus caught in a vicious circle of unsuccessful endeavours to express herself, leading to the situation where the impossibility of speaking the truth and the simultaneous desire to do so become a defining feature of her personality and the reason for her alienation:

> [S]he attempted to describe how painful and frightening it was not to feel able to articulate the chronic depression's excruciating pain itself but to have to resort to recounting examples that probably sounded, she always took care to acknowledge, dreary or self-pitying or like one of those people who are narcissistically obsessed with their "painful childhoods" and "painful lives" and wallow in their burdens and insist on recounting them at tiresome length to friends who are trying to be supportive and nurturing, and bore them and repel them. (38)

The depressed person's experience and desire are essentially those of the writer who, like Wallace, wants to make himself understood but repeatedly fails to do so, imprisoned by the formal limits of writing, and who therefore has no choice but to endlessly and tediously repeat himself.[1] In the 1997 interview, Wallace explained what may be called repetitive nature of his writing in the following way: "I have this problem of thinking that I haven't made myself clear

[1] Wallace himself suffered from severe depression which finally led to his suicide in 2007.

or that the argument hasn't been sufficiently hammered down so I make the same point five, six, seven times" (Interview). In *Brief Interviews*, the desire "to make [himself] clear" results in a kind of repetition compulsion visible not only on the level of themes, characters or content, but also in the very titles of the short stories, four of which are entitled "Brief Interviews with Hideous Men" and three "Yet Another Example of the Porousness of Certain Borders." The repeated titles perform a twofold function: by questioning the authenticity and uniqueness of the pieces, they fracture the text, reminding us of the arbitrary authorial choice and the "porousness" of all stories, but at the same time they point to a certain underlying structure or continuity in the arrangement of the text as a whole. On the one hand, in order to reflect adequately the reality in which we live, any contemporary text must mirror the postmodern collapse of boundaries. As Wallace states:

> It seems to me that reality is fractured right now, at least the reality that I live in. The difficulty about writing about that reality is that text is very linear and unified and you, I anyway, am constantly on the look out for ways that fracture the text that are totally disoriented. (Interview)

On the other hand, however, the text must also display a certain unity in order to demonstrate what Wallace calls "some sort of weird ambient *sameness* in different kinds of human relationships" (*Brief Interviews* 156), the "queer nameless ambient urgent interhuman sameness" (157). To discover what this sameness consists in, what it actually is and how to transcribe it into fiction seems to be the major aim of Wallace's project.

Commenting on the self-reflexive techniques of postmodern texts which grant everything the status of a text only and their impact on our notion of reality, Slavoj Žižek states that

> instead of conferring on these gestures a kind of Brechtian dignity . . . one should rather denounce them for what they are: the exact opposite of what they claim to be – *escapes from the Real, desperate attempts to avoid the real of the illusion itself, the Real that emerges in the guise of an illusory spectacle*. (*Lacan*)

This attempt to refuse the existence of the Real is what *Brief Interviews* accuses metafiction of: leading us to the emptiness that lies at the heart of all stories – fictional, social, individual – metafiction replaces its danger with the optimism of an illusion of omnipotence, whether of the writer or the reader. Thus, instead of reality as text, it gives us reality as play, and that is whence the transgressive quality of the new form emerges: in insisting on the importance of remembering about the physicality of the reader and writer, and therefore on the closeness of the meaningless Real which defines our "sameness," it strives to remind us of the source of all stories, of the destructive illusion of control they give, and of the responsibility involved in their creation.

The compulsion to repeat which structures the stories originates in the need to re-live or re-tell a certain traumatic experience so as to domesticate it and devoid it of its disturbing potential. The stories from *Brief Interviews* frequently refer to traumatic events which are portrayed as, paradoxically, the only means of making a meaningful contact with another human being. For the hideous men of the interviews, it is only when a woman reveals some traumatic ordeal from her past, such as gang-rape or torture by a serial killer, that she stops being simply a "sexual object" and becomes a "person." Thus, trauma seems to be presented as the ultimate, genuine experience, in fact the only experience that forces us to move beyond the sphere of words and signs into the real world of objects and beings. As one of the men puts it, "[H]ave it [a traumatic event] happen and you get a real taste of the Dark Side. Not just the *idea* of darkness, the genuine Dark Side" (121), the genuine reality. In the postmodern world, trauma performs the cathartic function of confronting us with "what we really are," of making us aware of what we are made of and thus liberating us to choose, to re-construct our identity. Having experienced trauma, we will "always deep-down know it's always a choice, that it's you that is making yourself up second by second every second from now on" (123). It is as if, by talking about the trauma without having to actually experience it, we come close to the truly transgressive experience, to the Real beyond language, yet without the danger of losing ourselves in it. The Real, after all, can only be glimpsed and then turned into a story. That is another reason why the stories of the trauma are not to be trusted, not only because they are narrated by the "hideous men," but because their telling makes us question the identities of the victim and the offender (so much so that we end up suspecting that the story-tellers themselves are the actual rapists and serial killers). There is a trauma involved, certainly, but it does not come from the hideous men's stories, but from the stories of the men telling the stories. What is represented as traumatic in Wallace's book is the postmodern subject, inhabiting the postmodern depersonalized world of missed encounters and narcissistic desires, where the "need for constant questioning" has lost sight of its object – the human being hidden behind many layers of narrative fictions – and of the emptiness behind all stories, of the silent void which necessitates recourse to ever more stories.

To describe postmodernism as a kind of trauma and the postmodern subject as lost seems risky and naïve, especially to those equipped with the know-how of postmodern criticism, and to identify the goal of the new mode of fiction as recovering the living human being perhaps even more so. Nevertheless, the desire to recover the reader, the flesh-and-blood being, is clearly expressed in Wallace's statement that he wants "to author things that both restructure worlds and make living people feel stuff" (qtd. in Max 48) and made even clearer in the metacommentaries included in *Brief Interviews*. "Octet," the medial short story

that originally was to comprise eight "pop quizzes" but ended up with the structure of "2+(2(1)) pieces" (*Brief Interviews* 154), contains extensive footnotes in which the writer strives to explain his critical stand. The use of the popular and dialogical form of quizzes, where the reader is invited to express her opinion or to solve a problem, is a metafictional device, just like the footnotes, Wallace's favourite form,[2] whose length significantly exceeds that of the text proper, undermining thus the conventional textual hierarchy and drawing the reader's attention to the text as not only an artefact, but also a never fully completed one. The footnotes are, essentially, also quizzes, where the writer asks for the reader's advice on how to write, describes the various problems he had with arranging the text and even includes the sections that had to be removed from the main text. This metafictional procedure, we are told, is not to be seen as metafictional as it comes from a writer who is "at least aware that metacommentary is now lame and old news and can't of itself salvage anything more" (*Brief Interviews* 159) and who knows that "flirting with metafictional self-reference . . . might come off lame and tired and facile, and also runs the risk of compromising the queer *urgency* about whatever it is you feel you want the pieces to interrogate in whoever's reading them" (146–47). The use of metafictional devices is risky because "by no means do you want a reader to come away thinking that the cycle is just a cute formal exercise in interrogative structure and S.O.P. metatext" (147), but it is also inevitable: like the characters described in the stories, the writer is also shut in the prison-house of meta-conventions. Similarly to postmodernism, metafiction has run its course; it has become conventional, too stiffly codified, too familiar and therefore no longer able to interrogate anything with any genuine urgency. In fact, "things have come to such a pass the belletristic fiction is now considered *safe* and *innocuous*" (157). What Wallace condemns metafiction for is what the stories' characters are criticized for: too preoccupied with the rules that govern social interaction, they lose sight of the interaction itself and thus miss any real encounter.

In literature, the metafictional preoccupation with form and play has deprived fiction of its revolutionary potential and turned it into just another instance of art for art's sake. But perhaps the greatest problem with the "postclever metaformal hooey" (*Brief Interviews* 151) is that it has become a terrifyingly narcissistic procedure whose aim of "puncturing the realist wall" has been exchanged for the master show of authorial condescension, uncannily similar to the patronizing tone of the hideous men's monologues. Metafiction is no longer about breaking boundaries and making the reader "feel things," but about

[2] As Wallace confessed: "The footnotes are very, very addictive. It's like almost having a second voice in your head" (Interview).

> the dramatist himself coming onstage from the wings and reminding you that what's going on is artificial and that the artificer is him (the dramatist) and but that he's at least respectful enough of you as reader/audience to be honest about the fact that he's back there pulling the strings, an 'honesty' which personally you've always had the feeling is actually a highly rhetorical sham-honesty that's designed to get you to like him and approve of him (i.e., the 'meta'-type writer) and feel flattered that he apparently thinks you're enough of a grownup to handle being reminded that what you're in the middle of is artificial (like you didn't know that already, like you needed to be reminded of it over and over again as if you were a myopic child who couldn't see what was right in front of you). (147)

Unlike the "meta-type writer," whose powerlessness and being lost in the text is by now unmasked as merely a pretence, the footnoted author should reject "the tired 'Hey-look-at-me-looking-at-you-looking-at-me' agenda of tired old S.O.P." (*Brief Interviews* 153), openly admit his powerlessness and seek advice in the reader. It is a risky gesture, not only because he will have to approach her with "completely naked helpless pathetic sincerity" (154), but mostly because personal contact is one of the few remaining taboos: "In fact one of the very last few interpersonal taboos we have is this kind of obscenely naked direct interrogation of somebody else. It looks pathetic and desperate. That's how it will look to the reader" (154). The interrogation is risky because, as Wallace insists, it is directed not to some abstract ideal reader, but to a being very much alive who, reaching for a book to get some rest after work, may find the questioning too obtrusive and too real:

> You should *not* deploy this tactic until you've soberly considered what it might cost. Because if you go ahead and do it (i.e., ask her straight out), this whole 'interrogation' thing won't be an innocuous formal belletristic device anymore. It'll be real. You'll be bothering her, the same way a solicitor who calls on the telephone just as you're sitting down to unwind over a good dinner is bothering you. (157)

However risky the interrogation may be, it is still worth making because of the "weird urgency" the author feels to deliver the message of some "weird sameness" which repeatedly appears in different kinds of human relationships and which Wallace describes as

> some nameless but inescapable '*price*' that all human beings are faced with having to pay at some point if they ever want truly to be with another person instead of just using that person somehow, a weird and nameless but apparently unavoidable 'price' that can actually sometimes equal death itself, or at least usually equals your giving up something (either a thing or a person or a precious long-held 'feeling' or some certain idea of yourself and your own virtue/worth/identity) whose loss will feel, in a true and urgent way, like a kind of death. (155–56)

The "nameless but inescapable price" that has to be paid in order to enter any social relation might be seen as the illusion of mastery and self-control, of

totality and self-possession that must be foregone with the entrance into the social space of language and other people. Lacan claims that subjectivity is socially constructed because it is through encountering other human beings that one forms and re-forms the idea of who one is ("Mirror Stage" 405–09). Consequently, what one is depends on how one is reflected from an other's position and the refusal to recognize this dependence equals a death of sorts. Postmodernism and metafiction echo the Lacanian image of the subject as socially constructed, but the appearance of the narcissistic "meta-author" who orchestrates the arrangements and creations of "realities" – or of the protagonists of *Brief Interviews* whose self-consciousness deludes them into believing in the power of self-creation – runs the danger of refusing to reflect the other as a subject and thus of not constructing any "real" intersubjective world. Perhaps that is why Wallace writes of the "redemptive urgency [he]'d wanted the octet to convey" (*Brief Interviews* 151), pointing thus to some sinful transgression of rules that needs to be redeemed and that may have been performed by the octet's metafictional predecessors. And perhaps, to refer to the Lacanian logic of the constitutive other again, the metafictional sin may be precisely that of the end of continuous self-questioning: rebelling against various meta-narratives, it has turned itself into a "hideous" meta-form which refuses to reflect the gaze of the other, of the writer and of the reader, and therefore ultimately becomes a dead-form.

Declaring its redemptive break with metafiction, *Brief Interviews* nevertheless employs an abundance of metafictional devices. It uses a heterogeneity of forms and genres, disturbs textual conventions in a number of ways, and repeatedly breaks the boundaries between art and reality, fiction and criticism, writing and painting. Like the "old" metafiction, it ushers the author into the text, shattering the illusion of objectivity, and tries to resurrect him as a fleshy being, not much unlike the reader, as a moral authority whose task is to supply the lost generation with meaningful values (Wallace qtd. in Max 54). The "new" author is actually

> more like a reader, in other words, down here quivering in the mud of the trench with the rest of us, instead of a *Writer*, whom we imagine to be clean and dry and radiant of command presence and unwavering conviction as he coordinates the whole campaign from back at some gleaming abstract Olympian HQ. (*Brief Interviews* 160)

Perhaps it is at this moment that the "new" metafiction can be fully related to trauma which, according to Cathy Caruth, is not only

> a repeated suffering of the event, but it is also a continual leaving of its site. . . . To listen to the crisis of a trauma . . . is not only to listen for the event, but to hear in the testimony the survivor's departure from it. (qtd. in Bruhm 273)

In this sense, then, the new metafiction is a post-traumatic kind of writing: it repeats the postmodern metafictional event, turns it into a story, and gives testimony to it so as to eventually depart from it. The goal of these two types of writing is essentially the same: to make the reader aware of the textual nature of reality; but the new writing does so in a more urgent, and therefore perhaps more "authentic" and responsible, way. Whether the new form is indeed new enough and whether it manages to contain the urgency of its message remains, as always, an open question. In Wallace's words, "again, this will be for you to decide. Nobody's going to hold your hand" (*Brief Interviews* 159).

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Studies in English Drama and Poetry

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