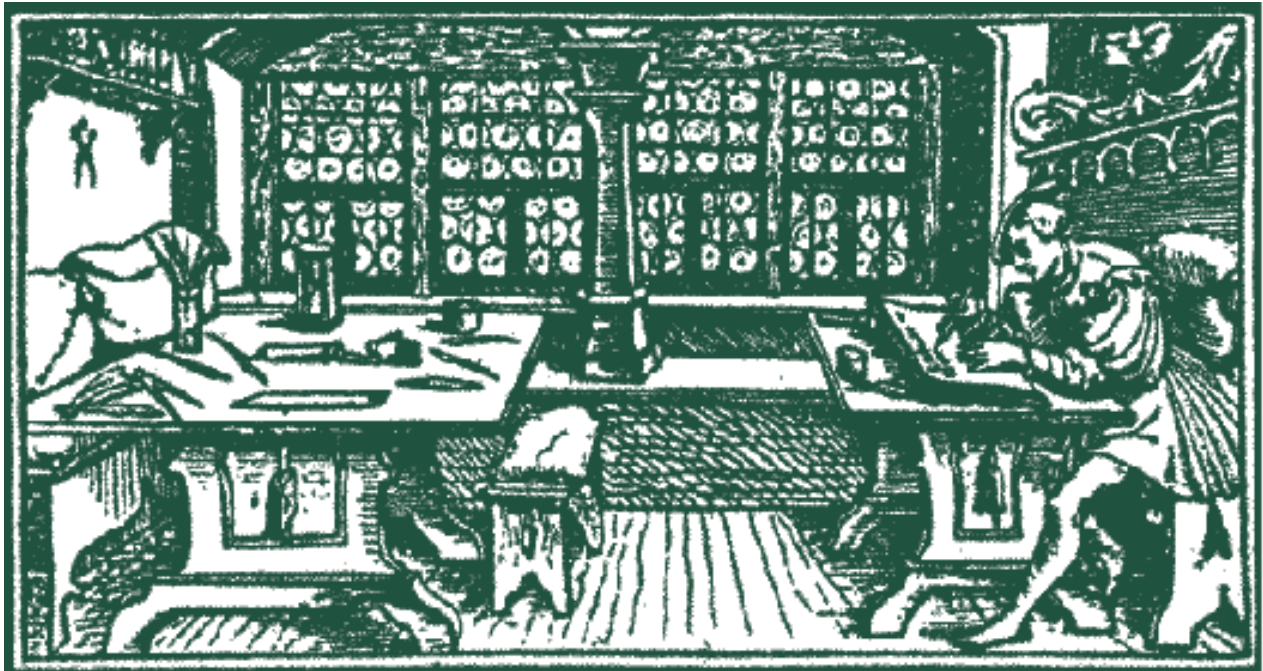




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THE DEIRDRE LEGEND REVISITED BY YEATS, SYNGE, AND LADY GREGORY. A TURKISH PERSPECTIVE

GONUL BAKAY¹

ABSTRACT. *“The Deirdre Legend Revisited by Yeats, Synge, and Lady Gregory. A Turkish Perspective”*. This paper deals with the different treatment of the Deirdre legend by three Irish authors: Synge, Yeats, and Lady Gregory. What linked these writers was their desire to prove the artistic and the conceptual value of Irish mythology. It is also important to point to the important role the idealized Irish woman played in this mythology, an element which is particularly relevant for a Turkish reader of these texts.

Keywords: Irish, mythology, woman, idealization, heroic, love, death.

REZUMAT. *„Legenda lui Deirdre în opera lui Yeats, Synge și Lady Gregory. O perspectivă turcească”*. Lucrarea de față investighează modulele diferite de a prelucra legenda lui Deirdre, utilizate de trei autori irlandezi: Synge, Yeats și Lady Gregory. Acești autori au în comun dorința de a demonstra valoarea artistică și conceptuală a mitologiei irlandeze. De asemenea, considerăm că este important de subliniat rolul remarcabil pe care varianta idealizată a femeii irlandeze îl joacă în această mitologie, fapt cu o relevanță specială pentru cititorul turc al acestor texte.

Cuvinte cheie: irlandez, mitologie, femeie, idealizare, eroic, dragoste, moarte.

In this paper I aim to examine the reasons behind the attraction of the Deirdre legend for the Irish authors: Synge, Yeats, and Lady Gregory and to prove that it is Synge who most successfully adapted the legend to the stage. The femme fatale story always had an attraction for writers but the major reason behind the use of legends by the above mentioned playwrights was the desire to show that Ireland had a mythology comparable to romantic and classical mythologies. The three playwrights had different reasons for choosing the Deirdre legend and hence treated the subject in alternative ways. What attracted most the three playwrights to the legend was that Deirdre symbolized the idealized Irish woman with her bravery, dignity and devotion to her lover. Also the return of the lovers to their home symbolized the unwavering love of the Irishman for his country.

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Lady Gregory's *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* is a prose narrative, rather stilted in style. The work is of importance today only as a source book. Instead of the Deirdre legend, *Grania* is generally considered to be Lady Gregory's most successful play. Lady Gregory herself preferred the Grania legend. "I turned to Grania," she said "because so many have written about the sad, lovely, Deirdre" (154). On the other hand, the subject of tragic love attracts the readers to the stories of Grania and Deirdre (Coxhead, 3). In addition, from a feminist point of view, what is remarkable in the stories of Deirdre and Grania is that the women do the pursuing. Women are the active narrative agent.

At first, Yeats was not particularly excited about Lady Gregory's translation of Irish legends into English mainly because he saw nothing in her past to make her fit for this job. However, he was in for a pleasant surprise since the style she adopted for this work eventually satisfied his expectations. Yeats commented on the first Book of *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*, "[m]y friend Lady Gregory has made the most lovely translation, putting the old prose and verse not into the pedantic Hedge school – master style of her predecessors, but into a musical caressing English, which never goes very far from the idiom of the people she knows so well". (Coxhead, 60).

While doing her research on Cuchulain in The British museum, Lady Gregory was reading Dickens' *Bleak House*. This novel offered her relief during her hard work and at the same time made her aware of the importance of style. She knew that the characters in heroic cycles seemed remote and far fetched to many readers. She used *Bleak House* as a model to create a more realistic and familiar style. Lady Gregory herself noticed, "[w]hen I went, looking for the stories in the old writing, I found that the Irish in them is too hard for any person to read that had not made a long study of it. It is what I have tried to do, to take the best of the stories, on whatever parts of each will fit best to one another, and that way to give a fair account of Cuchulain's life and death. I have told the whole story in plain and simple words, in the same way my old nurse Mary Sheridan used to be telling stories from Irish legends long ago" (5).

Lady Gregory had two reasons for writing this epic: to tackle the concept of idealism and to challenge the hegemony of conservative males in the field of Celtic studies (Kiberd, 400). The versions of the heroic cycles available in learned journals lacked coherence. Yet she welded them into a unity. When she asked the clerk in the British museum for some material on Cuchulain, the librarian asked whether the reading would take two hours. In reality, it took two years. Moreover, Lady Gregory wrote this epic, hoping that it would often be read aloud since oratory and recitation were much praised arts in Ireland at the turn of the century. Gregory's method was to explore contemporary issues, by means of a narrative set in the past. The attraction of the Cuchulain legend for Anglo- Irish writers is to have belonged to a period before sectarian and political turbulence. In her own search for personal fame through writing *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*, Gregory combined

self gratification and social fulfillment. As Kiberd observes, “[i]t was as if the Celtic hero was her undiscovered animus, a secret self which had lain dormant for years beneath the exterior of the cool wife and Widow”(408). It is also extremely important to mention Declan Kiberd’s observation that Gregory’s *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* had a major influence on the texts of the time (145).

Compared to Lady Gregory, Yeats’ poetic use of the same material is not so powerful. In *Deirdre* he does not present his hero raging murderously against the mother of his son. On the contrary, in Lady Gregory’s *Cuchulain*, the title character comes upon a great white stone and says, “If I had the head of the woman that sent her son to his death, I would split it as I split this stone” (319). The violence is overwhelming. In Gregory’s *Cuchulain*, it is the identity of the son that is mysterious. Conlaoh vehemently rejects any such attempt. “I will never give in to any man to tell my name, or to give an account of myself“ (315). When he recognizes his father, he sends a crooked spear in order not to injure him. The tragedy is that Cuchulain doesn’t recognize his son and kills him. They both curse the person who has caused this misunderstanding between them. Conlaoh makes the following vehement reproach to his mother. “My curse be on my mother for it was she who put me under bonds: it was she who sent me under bonds to try my strength against yours” (316). Cuchulain maintains the same bitter tone. “My curse be on your mother, the woman that is full of treachery; it is through her hurtful thoughts that these tears have been brought on us”(316).

Lady Gregory created a strong hero who could change the world at his will. Admiring strong men, she closely identified with the hero. Although Lady Gregory introduced a number of changes to the tales, she emphasized important episodes from the life of Cuchulain. His indifference to pain and death won him the championship of Ulster. The jealousy of Emer, the battle with Medbh for the bull of Cualigne, and his foretold death are also important narrative elements. Lady Gregory removed many of the supernatural elements from the tale in order to emphasize the heroism of the protagonist in merely human terms. Cuchulain had many lovers before Deirdre and his wife, and he even had a relationship with queen Aoife of Scotland.

What is very interesting is that he begins his life as a bashful youth. When he kills three challengers in a fit of rage, they send three women to meet him red – naked. “When the boy saw the women coming, there was shame on him, and he leaned down his head into the cushions of the chariot and hid his face in them. And the wildness went out of him” (52).

It is extremely interesting that Lady Augusta Gregory portrayed Deirdre as a strong and brave character. Gregory’s Deirdre has strong instincts and it is she who warns Naoise not to return to his home. She makes terrible forebodings of dark times that lie ahead. “There is the howling of dogs in my ears, a vision of the night is before my eyes. I see Fergus before my eyes, I see Conchubar without mercy in his dun; I see Naoise without strength in the battle. I see Conchubar asking for

blood. I see Fergus caught with hidden lies I see Deirdre crying with tears” (118). She knows that it is Fergus who comes with a message of peace from Conchubar and she observes this in such poetical terms, “for honey is not sweeter than a message of peace sent by lying men” (118).

For Yeats, besides the attraction of being a major love story, the Deirdre legend symbolized his unrequited love for Maud Gonne. Yeats gave us a one-act play in verse. As a play it has many weaknesses. Yeats’ poetic subjectivity is a handicap in this play for he could not transfer efficiently the sweeping passion of the story. Despite some powerful scenes such as the chess scene where Deirdre confesses her love to Naoise and the scene where she tells Conchubar that she will be his queen, the play is not particularly successful as a work of drama. And if compared to Synge’s *Deirdre of Sarrows*, the characterization is weak. Yeats believed that one could find the traditions of undying beauty that linked the ancient myth to all the people’s lives in the existing stories. He also believed that it was from these stories that living Irish culture and imaginative growth should emerge. He argued that the political fall caused by the fall of Parnell should be compensated by national feeling. As Peter Ure observes, “this is the play where Yeats’ views on criticism, propaganda and oracular sayings on the needs of the theatre at the time of Deirdre’s stage adaptation were reflected” (48).

The play is about the last moments of a tragic character. “In *Deirdre* everything concentrates on the way the single heroic individual confronts her destiny. Yeats was striving to create a character like Odysseus, Don Quixote and Hamlet who are with us always” (48). When the curtain opens, we can a plainly furnished room. On the table there are a chess board, chess men, a loaf of bread, and a flagon. The musicians tell the whole story that leads to the final event. King Conchubar finds a beautiful female child of unknown parents and raises her. Afterwards he falls in love with her and wants to make her his queen. She refuses because she has fallen in love with the young and handsome Naisi. The lovers run away and live happily for six years. Yet they cannot wander forever; one day they must return home. Fergus, an old friend of Conchubar’s, enters the scene to make peace between Conchubar and the lovers. The musicians stress that they are not convinced of the good intentions of Conchubar, they feel that he cannot forgive them so easily. The dark- faced men who pass by the window foreshadow dark events. Fergus orders the musicians to sing a happy song. They sing about the passion of love which either brings unhappiness or contentment. Yet Deirdre and Naisi cannot hear the song. The scene foreshadows dark events. Deirdre is ready to adapt to the situation although she does not have too many clues about how the tale will end. The musicians suggest that they have traveled a lot and know that old men are jealous and their love is hard to cure. Fergus suggests a positive ending to the story. “You are not of this country or you’d know. They are in my charge and all is forgiven” (line 69). There is an overwhelming sense of silence and isolation.

The chessboard scene refers to another story in which the hero, Ludaig Redstripe, plays chess while awaiting for his death. Fergus and Naoise leave while Deirdre talks to the musicians. Musicians tell Deirdre that Conchubar is preparing a

bridal bed for her. At first, Naisi and Fergus try to reassure Deirdre but gradually, Naisi begins to have doubts as well. Naoise decides to confront Conchubar but a messenger prevents this. Naoise has forebodings of the impending doom. Deirdre is one of the most complex characters that Yeats has created. She decides to destroy her beauty so that men would no longer be interested in her. Fergus tells Deirdre and Naoise that they should play chess while waiting for Conchubar at the table where a former royal couple, Ludaigh Redstripe and his queen Derbfargaille, had played chess while waiting for their end. Naoise also mentions that the royal couple had been very cool to the end. Fergus attributes the queen's composure to the "cold sea's blood" in her vein. The musicians stress that there is a tale to tell and the couple should finish it. At first, Deirdre and Naoise decide to behave like the royal couple; they sit down to play the game in quiet composure. Yet suddenly, Deirdre stops the game saying, "I cannot be like that woman who has cold blood in her veins" (line 566). Deirdre knows that she is full of passion. Unlike the queen she cannot be passive. In the tragic game as well as in the minds of the audience, she will live forever. Naoise is killed at Conchubar's orders and Deirdre kills herself.

For a truly dramatic treatment of the Deirdre legend, we have to turn to Synge who was most interested in topical subjects and did not treat his characters in isolation; in contrast, he made them come to life by juxtaposing the ugly with the beautiful and by referring to contemporary events. Deirdre comes to life when she turns from a care-free young girl into a tragic woman. The play is written in Synge's version of the Irish peasant speech. The character treatment shows the marked realism so characteristic of Synge. Consequently, one thinks he rightly deserves to be considered the author who best adapted the Deirdre legend to the theater.

Synge's adaptation is probably the nearest to the spirit of the original. He did not wish to envelope the Deirdre legend in a dream like atmosphere. Instead, he wanted to adapt his characters to the present life. As Ellis Fermor suggests, " Synge belongs, not by sentiment and wistful longing , but by the roots of his nature to the Celtic noonday, which had been sweet and sane" (192). Synge stresses the tension between reality and dream as well as their mutability.

From the beginning, the conflict between Conchubar and Deirdre is foregrounded. Conchubar is a materialistic character; he can only show his love by providing materialistic comfort. He tries to prepare Deirdre for the life of the palace. He cannot understand that this life does not suit Deirdre since Deirdre belongs to the hills and dales, to nature. Lavarcham is the only one who can truly understand Deirdre. When she ignores the rich ornaments, Deirdre shows her preference for the life of feelings. Conchubar cannot understand the intuitive life. Deirdre prefers a bag of nuts and twigs to all the fineries offered by Conchubar. When Conchubar understands that he cannot win Deirdre by fineries, he decides to use force and make her come to him. Deirdre is frightened and pleads, "Leave me this place where I am well used to the tracts, pathways and the people of the glens. It is for this life I am born surely" (284). However, Conchubar refuses to listen.

Deirdre's view of life deeply influences her actions. She knows that everything in life is transitory and that death will come to everyone. She also believes that the only thing that can make life worthwhile is love. So one should try to enjoy life as fully as he can. She looks out of the window and sees Naisi and her brothers. She knows that they will seek shelter in her hut because of the storm. But Naisi keeps her distance knowing Conchubar's interest in her. Deirdre convinces Naisi that time is flying by and that they should seize the day while they can. Deirdre and Naisi run away and wander for six years. However, in the end they realize that they have to return to their country.

Although Deirdre and Naisi love each other, their relationship is by no means perfect. In time everything changes and deteriorates. The fault belongs to no one. This is how things are, this is the nature of things. Deirdre and Naisi's love is only six years old and yet it is fading. Fergus stresses the Irishman's desire to return to his native land. He says to Naisi, "You'll not be young always. It's little joy wondering till age is on you" (199). Naisi, unaware that Deirdre is listening, comments, "I'll not tell you a lie. There have been days a while past when I have been throwing a line for salmon or watching for the run of hares, that I have a dread upon me a day'd come I'd weary of her voice and Deirdre has seen I'd wearied" (312).

Deirdre knows that there is no running away from death and decay. She observes, "There is no safe place, Naisi, on the ridge of the world..... it's this hour we've between the daytime and a night where there is sleep forever ... there are many ways to wither love as there are stars in a night of Samhain but there is no way to keep life or love with it a short space only" (II,59). Naisi responds, "You are right maybe it should be a poor thing to see great lovers and they are sleepy and old" (316).

The lovers decide to return but Owen doesn't agree with this move. Owen eventually commits suicide. The somber tone and the stage directions foreshadow Deirdre and Naisi's sad end. The lovers know that their end is near and yet they return. They know that no pleasant end is waiting for them; they come back because they don't want their love to wither. Synge has made some alterations in the story. Conchubar is growing old and offers the lovers a high position in exchange for reconciliation. Yet the lovers are not deceived.

At the beginning of Act III, we see Conchubar waiting for Deirdre. He is older but not wiser. His only hope is that Deirdre can finally give a meaning to his remaining life. His examining the door to make sure that it is closed is highly suggestive. He may be arranging a surprise event for the lovers. According to Alan Price, "[f]or an audience to await an inevitable end for nearly all the last act of a play is not normally good drama. To provide and maintain interest and tension, to give variety of pace and mood is difficult" (202). Yet, Synge gives the audience hope by making Deirdre talk in a pleasant way while trying to make peace between Naisi and Conchobar. Deirdre observes, "we are so near the grave, we seem three lonesome people and by a new made grave, there's no man who will be brooding on a woman's lips or on the man he hates" (332). At first, it seems as if Conchubar has weakened, but when the shouts of Ardan and Ainnle are heard, the peaceful mood is over. Conchubar observes, "I was near won this night, but death's between us now" (333).

The final section of the play is the most powerful one. It stresses the theme that death is inevitable and love is the only force that can stand up against death. Deirdre is confident knowing that their love will live after their death and it will always be young and fresh because it wasn't allowed to wither and be destroyed by time. The ebb and flow of the sea, the waves touching the shore continuously, the repetition suggests death, decay, and renewal. Ultimately, it suggests that as there will always be the sea and waves, as this continuum will always endure, their love will become one with nature and it will continue. Deirdre's preparations for death show her strength when facing the inevitable. Her referring to the light and dark images in nature suggests that inevitably there are dark and light phases in life. In Deirdre's words, "it is not I will quit your head, when it's many a dark night among the snipe and plover that you and I were whispering together it is not I will quit your head, Naisi, when it is many a night when we saw the stars among the clear trees of Glen de Ruadh, or the moon pausing to rest her on the edges of the hills" (340).

Deirdre's final speeches suggest her preparing for the other world where nothing changes and ultimately, the love of herself and Naisi will last to eternity. The nature images suggest that the whole nature will mourn the death of the lovers. Her sadness is overwhelming, "I see the trees naked and bare and the moon shining. Little moon, little moon of Alban, lonesome you'll be this night and tomorrow night, and long nights after, and you pacing the woods, beyond Glen Laoi, looking every place for Deirdre and Naisi, the lovers who slept so sweetly with each other" (344).

Synge stresses that death and love are the only truths in life. The audience views Conchubar's progression to true awareness. Finally, Conchubar also realizes that everything is bound to decay. He realizes that if he can't win Deirdre, there will be no meaning in life. He tries to win her with promise of riches and finery: "But you and I will have a little peace in Emain, with harps playing and old men telling stories at the fall of the night. There was never a queen in the east who had a house like your house that is waiting for you in Emain" (337). At that instant, the soldiers' cries are heard, "Emain is in flames, Fergus has come back, and is setting fire to the world. Come up, Conchubar or your state will be destroyed" (337).

Although Synge stresses that Deirdre's choice was the right choice, still he insists that there is another choice in life. Is it worthwhile to go on living when all chance of love is dead?

Synge has also added another character to the play, Lavarcham, Deirdre's nurse. This new dramatic element was meant to show that there is still contentment in the continuation of life. And here is Lavarcham in her own voice,

"If it ails you, I tell you there is little hurt in getting old, though young girls and poets do be storming at the shape of age. There is little hurt getting old, save when you're looking back, the way I am looking this way, and seeing the young who have a love for breaking up their hearts with folly." (Act II, 60)

Synge made the legend his own. Many critics could not understand why he, whose art was naturalistic, should yield to write about a dreamland. One could perhaps say that Synge was gratifying his historical sense in writing *Deirdre* or that he would not be considered a true Irish dramatist if he did not write a *Deirdre*. He divided the legend into three dramatic episodes and handled the tale as a peasant folk tale. Synge's *Deirdre* was not a queen but an unsophisticated child of nature. He brought her into the real world. He brought new vitality to the play by creating the grotesque character of Owen and also writing in the peasant language of his other plays: "queens get old, *Deirdre*, with their white and long arms going from them, and their backs ... I tell you it is a poor thing to see a queen's nose reaching down to scrape her chin" (347) or "it's a poor thing to be so lonesome, you'd squeeze kisses on a cur dog's nose" (349). Despite being an unfinished piece of work it is considered to be the best dramatic *Deirdre*. Had Synge finished it, it would have been his masterpiece. Perhaps what makes Synge's *Deirdre* so unique is that he, like *Deirdre*, had experienced and internalized the sweet tragedy of love. He had found love at the end of his days and knew that his time was running out. It is this sense of impending doom that gives the play its beauty. I would like to conclude my paper with the words of Maurice Bourgeois. I believe he best catches the uniqueness of Synge's play.

"The author, having obtained full mastery over his medium, is able to comprehend and express the deepest of all truths – the truth of the nature of existence; it is because he bids farewell to life that he grasps it to the full" (217).

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TRANSFEMINIZING POSTFEMINISM: ACKER RE-WRITES THE TRANS-, *BAISE-MOI* RE-READS THE POST-

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ABSTRACT. “*Transfeminizing Postfeminism: Acker Re-Writes the Trans-, Baise-Moi Re-Reads the Post-*”. Through the discussion of Kathy Acker’s novels *Great Expectations* (1982) and *In Memoriam to Identity* (1990), and Virginie Despentes’s film *Baise Moi*, this article discusses the different ramifications of postfeminism—in particular, transfeminism. Space is used here to reveal—and contest—new forms of women objectification.

Keywords: Postfeminism, body and space, multiplicity, transfeminism, Kathy Acker.

REZUMAT. „*Transfeminizarea postfeminismului: Acker re-scrie trans-, Baise-Moi re-citește post-*”. Analizând romanele scriitoarei Kathy Acker, *Great Expectations* (1982) și *In Memoriam to Identity* (1990), și filmul *Baise Moi* de Virginie Despentes, lucrarea de față dezbate diferitele ramificații ale postfeminismului, în special ale transfeminismului. Spațiul este utilizat aici pentru a dezvălui - și pentru a contesta - noi forme de reprezentare a femeii.

Cuvinte cheie: postfeminism, corp și spațiu, diversitate, transfeminism, Kathy Acker.

Introduction

“We come from radical feminism, we are dykes, whores, trans, migrants, blacks, hetero-dissidents... we are the wrath of the feminist revolution, and we want to turn nasty; we want to come out of gender cabinets and political correction, and we want to let our desire free by being politically incorrect, by being annoying, by rethinking ourselves and by resignifying our own mutations...”

In agreement with the aforementioned quote from the *Transfeminist Manifest* (2010), Kathy Acker asserts in her acclaimed 1982 novel *Great Expectations* that “I feel I feel I feel I have no language, any emotion for me is a prison” (24), and eight years later, she exposes through one of her characters in *In Memoriam to Identity* that “Language and the flesh are not separate. Language is truly myth. All my senses touch words. Words touch the senses. Language isn’t only translation, for the word is blood” (90). These words seem to contest Manu’s intentions in Despentes’s *Baise-moi* (2000), “I’ve thought about taking a jump or

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burning alive. Self-immolation is pretty pretentious. After we finish in the Vosges, let's do the jump without the bungee.”

This article studies the discursive deformations of Kathy Acker’s and Virginie Despentes’s narratives to embody the celebration of silenced voices, as well as to position contemporary women’s writing into the political subaltern uprising favored by fiction production. Rooting from Deleuze’s principle of multiplicity, Acker’s and Despentes’s narratives question the relation of multiplicity with subject, subjectivity and identity production, and they reconcile the performative function of those voices with intertextuality as a machinery of discursive production. Acker aims at resignifying hegemonic metanarratives from a political imposture of transgression, violence, and plagiarism that is reappropriated by both the political agents involved in transfeminisms and the *viragoing* body discourses shown in Despentes’s *Baise-moi*.

What this project attempts to enhance is thus Despentes’s and Acker’s understanding of the heteromorphic subjectivities rooting from the heterosexual matrix as discourses that investigate the altered relations between posthuman *bodies* and post-industrial, postmodern spaces, and that utilize Deleuze’s articulation of rhizome to favor the construction of a common ground for subaltern voices as legitimized discourses. This articulation can only be successfully performed by means of a theoretical approach that adopts contingent forms of recognition and identification of the heterosexual matrix, albeit a critical reading of postfeminist values.

One of the claims generated from current discussions on the nature of postfeminism is that there has been a backlash against the idea that women determine their positions as producers and agents of their own identity; in effect, the term postfeminism has evidently been charged with retrogressive nuances². These pronouncements are contested by postfeminists who claim that this new (and misperceived) direction in feminist thought is a reaction against the constrictive forms of what they call “previous dogmatic feminisms.” The shift would be, therefore, from a double standard of recurrently redefining ideology towards the recovery of women’s own power to define their selves and to write their own subjectivities, even if that recovery entails an integration of “masculine discourses” in the writing of the self as a purely performative discursivity. As such, a question that arises is whether or not there has been an emergence of a “postfeminist condition” and, if so, what the consequences are upon other –previous- forms of feminisms. Also, it is important to demarcate the scope of this new approach to women studies and to study its borders –and concomitances- with other forms of feminism, such as radical feminism or –more importantly in this essay- transfeminism³.

In this article, I discuss some of the most prominent theoretical tendencies within postfeminism, a controversial concept that is still in the process of formation,

² See, for example, Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra, *Interrogating postfeminism: gender and the politics of popular culture*, or Elaine J. Hall and Marnie Salupo Rodriguez, “The Myth of Postfeminism”.

³ For more on the increasing power of transfeminism within feminist discourses, refer to Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors*, and Krista Scott-Dixon, *Trans/forming Feminisms: Transfeminist Voices Speak Out*.

mostly instigated by the confrontation with traditional forms of feminist thought which presuppose that postfeminism is a step backwards in the progress of women's rights in contemporary societies. I interrogate this critique of postfeminism and I then attempt to elucidate the implications of postfeminism as a progressive development in the achievements of "traditional feminisms", while also highlighting its oppositional stance toward them, thereby problematizing a prescriptive definition. "Transfeminizing postfeminism" –as it appears in the title of this essay- represents an attempt to focus on the multiple ramifications of postfeminism as a tool to continue the discussion on the difficulties experienced by women to write their subjectivities and produce their own meaningful identifications. In order to articulate these two complicated concepts (postfeminism and transfeminism), we need to start off by taking a look into the specific meaning of these two words as they are conceptualized in current discourses of gender.

Postfeminism and Transfeminism. A history against heteropatriarchy

In their introduction to *Interrogating Postfeminisms: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*, Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra provide an apologetic description of postfeminism:

Postfeminism broadly encompasses a set of assumptions, widely disseminated within popular media forms, having to do with the "pastness" of feminism, whether that supposed pastness is merely noted, mourned, or celebrated. Crucially for us, postfeminism suggests a more complex relationship between culture, politics, and feminism than the more familiar framing concept of "backlash" allows. Feminist activism has long met with strategies of resistance, negotiation, and containment, processes that a model of backlash [...] cannot effectively incorporate within the linear chronology of social change on which it seems to be premised. What appears distinctive about contemporary postfeminist culture is precisely the extent to which a selectively defined feminism has been so overtly "taken into account [...] to emphasize that it is no longer needed" (1).

It is that complex cultural component within feminist thought what is at stake in this essay. Postfeminism has to deal with the burden with which the prefix "post" means to resignify the lexeme it precedes, since this resignified concept has been widely understood to refer to the end of feminism and to a backward movement towards the heterosexual matrix and its logocentric nature⁴. However, the cross-cultural identification of postfeminism with popular culture since its origins provides the term with a tendency to *normalize* the social status of women both as women and as people, and it makes of postfeminism a theoretical, but also an applied- framework for the struggle of women equality in contemporary society.

⁴ "Raunch culture and the end of feminism". *The Sunday Times*. May 7, 2006. Accessed June 8, 2010. <<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/article714019.ece>> and Amelia Jones, "Postfeminism, a Remasculinization of Culture".

As Angela McRobbie points out, therefore, with the inclusion of “post”, postfeminism can give the deceiving impression that all aims of feminist thought have been met and that feminist theories make no sense any longer, but postfeminist propositions would rather confront that idea in favor of an epistemological opposition to the cease of hostilities announced by such interpretations of postfeminist purposes⁵. Many times postfeminism has been adjectivized with antifeminist nuances, what seems to be adequate to certain developments of the term during the 1980s, but something that has been minimized by later occurrences of the term.

Then, how is transfeminism related to the transversal functionality of postfeminism as a cultural critique –yet a cultural affirmation- of previous feminist theoretical standards? Can transfeminism be understood as the oblique feature necessary for postfeminism to lay down as a plausible alternative to allegedly dogmatic second-wave feminist trends? An objective depends on what we understand by transfeminism, as this is again a concept that includes many opposing definitions.

In the 2010 Transfeminist Manifesto⁶, there is a pronouncement that particularly attracts readers’ attention: “It’s not enough with just being women anymore” As it can be inferred from what follows to this controversial statement, feminist discourses are not enough to respond to the necessities of the heterogeneous group of people who feel integrated in the transfeminist epistemology: dykes, whores, trans, immigrants, blacks, heterodissidents, etc. react against a methodological pattern that has been reified and transformed in a traditional binary relation of power. The aforementioned quote is directly addressed to the purportedly reductionist views of second wave feminism, and goes hand in hand with third-wave and postfeminist claims about the inclusion of Other women in the discourses of feminisms. Such a need for the verbalization of the self though is typical of amorphous, horizontally-structured groups in order for them to reaffirm an incursion into their identifications as subjective beings. Kathryn Hume in her “Voice in Kathy Acker’s Fiction” explains and summarizes this argument by saying that “...Lanser’s articulation of “communal voice” bears some resemblance to Acker’s letting the voice shift among her characters, such that many speak in the same tonalities and collectively come to be a community of the freakish, the dispossessed, those who do not fit in” (487).

“It’s not enough”. The ontological lack that is expressed with this claim is the basis of transfeminist thought. There are “bastardized” factions of feminism that have not been explored sufficiently or that are misrepresented in the mainstream discourses of feminism⁷. Such marginalized spatialities are being vindicated in the discourses of transfeminism as legitimized ontological machineries to write –and

⁵ See Angela McRobbie, “Post-Feminism and Popular Culture”.

⁶ “Manifiesto TransFeminista”, *Mi feminismo y otras alteridades*. Web, January 1, 2010. <<http://gaelia.wordpress.com/2010/01/01/manifiesto-transfeminista/>> Accessed June 8, 2010.

⁷ For more information on the application of subcultural notes to literary analysis, see Synda Gregory’s “Junk and Punk Aesthetics”.

interpret- the narratives of the self and those of the body. Emerging from –therefore not radically opposed to- feminism, this new theoretical paradigm fosters the discourses of transgender spaces, queer visualities, as well as everything related to non-normative struggles. A contradictory movement in nature, transfeminism explores the experiences, contingent spaces, synergies and connivances of these subaltern groups off the margins of hegemonic feminism, because “it’s not enough” to claim a space that pertains to women –and only “women”- discourses. For the aforementioned dissidents of heteropatriarchy, there are spaces Other within the narratives of sex and gender that must be considered, questioned, and validated through mechanisms of resistance, summarized –again- in the “trans-“ prefix.

This counter-discursivity of resistance appears to be the contact zone between transfeminism and postfeminism. Both lines of theoretical discussions manifest a particular tendency to be inclined towards the study of the social milieu pertaining to women discursivities, rather than to a theoretical catch-22 reduced to the framework of sex-gender binary pairing. Subversive action is articulated with places of resistance and both are settled as milestones of flowing, rhizomatic identities, in what is taken as a continuous deferral of the female writing of their selves, as a set of actions that might be interpreted as harsh criticism against more traditional forms of feminism.

Kathy Acker and Transfeminism.

This celebration of silenced voices is finely represented in the discursive deformations introduced by both Kathy Acker and Virginie Despentes. The necessity of positioning gender and sex relations in a heteromorphic, multiple, and rhizomatic disposition is depicted in these authors’ narratives from a subversive angle, and articulated as a transient reading of feminism in which all sorts of transitions are not only permitted but rather emphasized. Deleuze’s principle of multiplicity acquires full significance as methodological framework when analyzing these texts, and its articulation with the rhizome as a decentering deontologization of ex-centric selves results in a well-constructed dialogue with both post and transfeminism. According to Deleuze’s own words in *Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*,

[The] principle of multiplicity is only when the multiple is effectively treated as a substantive, "multiplicity," that it ceases to have any relation to the One as subject or object, natural or spiritual reality, image and world. Multiplicities are rhizomatic, and expose arborescent pseudomultiplicities for what they are. There is no unity to serve as a pivot in the object, or to divide in the subject. There is not even the unity to abort in the object or "return" in the subject. (8)

Such a frontal attack against binary systematizations of the self is reappropriated by the discourses of transfeminisms in both *Great Expectations* and *In Memoriam to Identity*, written by Kathy Acker in 1982 and 1990 respectively. She adapts multiplicity to a fragmentary reconfiguration of her performative self to

problematize the relationship between identity and the subject, and give way to the multiplicity of subjectivity as the ontological ground for flowing identifications. The speaking voices in Acker's novels converge onto a heteromorphic, heterotopic narrator that is unidentifiable and spectral in nature, yet it hopelessly tries to explore itself for any recognizable traits of identity: "Terence told me that despite my present good luck my basic stability my contentedness with myself alongside these images, I have the image obsession I'm scum. This powerful image depends on the image of the Empress, the image I have of my mother" (*GE*, 6). This initial approach to the description of her identity is used by the narrator to reveal the multiplicity that defines –in this particular case– the representation of her identity: she is given identity by another subjectivity –Terence– who questions her current appearance and relies on a allegedly permanent *image* of herself ("I have the image obsession I'm scum") in turn based on an imaginary construction of her mother. As the novel progresses more identity layers are added to the compound structure of this character, giving way to a multidimensional recreation of the speaking voice beyond the binary oppositions of man/woman, male/female, or heterosexual/homosexual. Those are the "arborescent pseudomultiplicities" mentioned by Deleuze in the quote above, which need to be transcended into reconfigurations of the identification process⁸.

As mentioned in the introduction of this article, Kathy Acker questions the relation of multiplicity with subject, subjectivity and identity production. Her appeal to forms of subaltern action within the realm of feminist performance aims to undermine the internal hegemonic discourses as well as to be inclined to disintegrate the traditional structures of identity formation that are based on arborescent stratifications, in coherence with Deleuze's lucubration:

A multiplicity has neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature (the laws of combination therefore increase in number as the multiplicity grows). An assemblage is precisely this increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections.

Both in *Great Expectations* and *In Memoriam to Identity*, Acker immerses her characters in explorations of the self that go beyond mere contemplations of their social contextualization. Through the transversal capabilities of transfeminism (represented in a transgressive prose that includes portraits of violence, subcultures, and transgendered women), Acker explores the spectacular violence of patriarchal structures, and tries to generate places of resistance that register how their particular subculture acquires full significance in a reconstructed heterotopic space. Her commitment to non-normative, non-conformist discourses is manifested through an exploration of the body as an inorganic conglomerate of gender, class, racial, and sexual discourses⁹. Such a view of the body discourses in multiplicity

⁸ For more information on the relation between

⁹ See Deleuze's development of BwO (Bodies without Organs) in *The Logic of Sense*.

reacts against the obedient and stagnant definitions that interpret the self as one that deals almost exclusively with the already standardized sex-gender pairing: “This old woman’s begging me to fuck her. Puke. I prefer boys in this heat. She’s uncovering her long flat tits, they look like worms [...]. A woman dancing all over her cell is beating up her tin toilet bowl like the picture we have of a crazy person cause she’s not getting affection” (*GE*, 18).

Acker recurrently plays with the idea of identifying subcultural notions with acts of madness. Transfeminism attempts to verbalize those marginalized discourses as a way for them to acquire agency without having to struggle to be included in heteronormative narratives of the self. Their –heterotopic– space is that of the margin, and from that space the subcultural narratives of the trans arise to give voice to discourses of alterity so that they can coexist with the narratives of biowomen and biomen¹⁰. When Acker has her narrator in *GE* telling about her relationship with her mother, in what can be understood as a contradictory reimagination of the self, she pleads for her right not to be identifies with a –logocentric– human:

So I fall down in a fit. I decide to be totally catatonic. I am unable to know anything. I have no human contacts. I am not able to understand language. They call me CRAZY. But I am not inhuman. I still have burning sexual desires. I still have a cock. I just don’t believe there’s any possibility of me communicating to someone in this world. (24)

The fragmentary voice in *GE* agrees with Donna Haraway’s words when she claims that “language is no longer an echo of the *verbum dei*, but a technical construct working on principles of internal generated difference”¹¹. The narrator performs her identity (“I decide to...”) rather than being an object of any sort of imposed ontological semantization through language. Multiplicity and difference integrate thus into a subversive attitude not only against traditional patriarchal patterns, but also against the hetero practices of those feminisms that advocate fixed, essentialist visions of sex and gender. Here, the “construct” is key to the reconfiguration of established identities, as it evolves from a position of destruction to one of performative construction: “I hate humans who want me to act like I can communicate to them. I hate feeling more pain because I’ve felt so much pain” (*GE* 24), and she ends her speech by saying that, “I feel I feel I feel I have no language, any emotion for me is a prison” (*GE* 24). While she emphasizes the importance of feelings (“I feel I feel I feel”) in her exploration of her self and in comparison with the paradoxical reification of language (“I have no language”), she also denounces the imposition of commodified emotions, which were initially

¹⁰ For more information about biowomen and biomen, see Platero, R. y Gómez, E. *Herramientas para combatir el Bullying Homofóbico*.

¹¹ See Chapter 10 (“The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Constitutions of Self in Immune System Discourse”) from *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*.

seen as an opposing force to logocentrism but that were transformed through time and through knowledge into canonized reinterpretations of what had once been a subversive practice.

Similarly, in *In Memoriam to Identity* Acker refers to the necessity of her characters to leave behind the constrictions of inferred signifiers assigned to emotions:

When I was a girl, the strongest feeling in me was to go out. That's how I put it. As far out as I could go, in any way, concerning anything. Then beyond. I didn't know what *out* meant, or it was this feeling I had in me. Like banging my head against a brick wall. Doing anything really stupid or really repetitive or sex was an easy way (at that time) to get out of jail (*MI*, 99).

“Out” is referred to as a space of self-determination that is beyond the limits of assigned definitions of the self. The narrator says “That’s how I put it”, in a clear reference to her regained agency to have control over the meanings of words through emotions (“the strongest feeling”). Again, when she says she intended to go beyond what was considered as “out”, the narrator expresses her necessity to break down the limiting boundaries that have been imposed over her understanding of identity, both by the patriarchal models and by the static feminist proposals that fought against the former. Banging her head against a wall¹², doing stupid things, repetitive things (again, “I feel I feel I feel”) or having sex (as an obscene practice¹³) are seen as tools of emancipation against the incarcerating system that has been built up –and solidified– by feminist views, in particular those based on the reaffirmation of women according to a certain epistemological model. Meanwhile, Acker confers on her characters the freedom to act outside those regulations, and look for a way out from those constrictive parameters.

***Baise-moi*. A postfeminist film?**

A visual representation of that liberty to act beyond the protocols of accepted definitions provided by profeminist views is Virginie Despentes’s film *Baise-moi*. A transposition of the homonym novel written by Despentes, this film tells the story of prostitute Nadine (Karen Lancaume) and porn actress Manu (Raffaëla Anderson), who are the marginal protagonists of a frenzy of violence against mainstream society. Sharing the same feelings of anger and disgust, they embark in a violent road trip characterized by a pattern of sex and murder.

Baise-moi functions as a discourse that can be read from multiple perceptions. One can be empathetic -yet condescending- with the intradiagetic main characters’ questioning of accepted moral values; one can also be offended by the sexual manifestations of the same character; or what’s more, one can be critical with the simple resolutions proposed by the text at a hermeneutical level.

¹² See Arthur F. Reading, “Bruises, Roses: Masochism and the Writing of Kathy Acker”

¹³ The utilization of obscenity as an aesthetic tool of emancipation is thoroughly discussed in Elinor Fuchs’s “Staging the Obscene Body”.

How is this relevant to the discussion of postfeminist values? Discursive performances in this text clearly defy boundaries in an attempt to confound definite categorizations, whether feminist or otherwise. In his article, "Baise-moi: Post-feminist performance," Adrian Gargett argues that "contemporary postfeminism dismantles the foundations of the key narratives of truth, subjectivity and representation" (113). He situates the violent and aggressive attitude of the female characters in "Baise-moi" towards men as an appropriation of traditional masculine discourses. He says: "Dismissing orthodox feminism, [Rafaella] Anderson likes the idea of smashing the testosterone myth, [and] invading the male domain of hardcore violence" (78).

Similarities between both texts (Despentes's and Acker's) are to be found in their theoretical posture toward the 'postfeminist condition.' *Baise-moi* opts for formulating a pastiche of masculine discourses of road-movie profligacy, whereas *Great Expectations* and *In Memoriam to Identity* parody bourgeois representations of the self-made subject by focusing on the narrator's discovery of herself as an active sexual child who goes on to build her identity through her taboo experiences of pleasure throughout her life. In Gargett's words, "Forget sex-and-desire as the epitome of female pleasure and the principle discourse of a feminist narrative; here fucking-and-shooting is what women want." The same analysis can easily be made of Acker's construction of her characters' worlds in which she realizes that her acknowledgement of their own private desires implies a re-negotiation of 'normal' moral values and creates a fragmentation in their identity to conceal "disapproved" sexual practices.

Nadine and Manu's account of their own development as sexual or self-sexualized *subjects* disrupts a stream of lethargy that has been rather common for contemporary visualizations of feminism who failed to openly verbalize a theoretical approach to Other sexual practices. Despentes's characters repeatedly insist on extending an invitation to the viewer to subvert their understanding of their own connotations as gendered beings, since that is what her film is in essence: an invitation to come out of the closet, as it were. It is in this realm where she invokes the nature of postfeminism beginning with a theoretical approach that encompasses queer readings as well as third-wave feminist nuances. We can perceive the presence in the text of these theoretical approaches when the director lets her main characters deconstruct patriarchal discourses of male-dominant body constructions by becoming active participants in those discourses. The application of a queer precept to affirm the difference in their identities makes of Nadine and Manu the epitome of the collective awakening that Despentes seeks for her viewers.

She proposes a process of queering accepted behaviors by invoking a revolution of subjectivities that celebrates the fact of emotionally undressing taboos. Nadine and –particularly- Manu extend an invitation to validate sexual discourses and performances that are ethically considered "off-limits." There are many explicit and implicit extracts in the film that show both a sexual interaction between same-sex characters and violent approaches against the heteronormative matrix, so that the narrative is constantly deconstructing the fixed features that

have been conferred to the gender-sex pairing. With her reading of man-woman sexual and violent performance, Despentès seems to be contradicting what Nikki Sullivan says in ‘Queering Straight Sex’: “Heterosexuality is in essence a battlefield on which only the male can ever be the victor” (123). The two protagonists in *Baise-moi* are clearly victorious in the confrontations they have with male (sexual) partners as they are able to control everything that surrounds their search for pleasure with the only objective of enhancing that pleasure through violence to subvert traditional assumption of male-female sexualities. Needless to say, absorption, integration, and transformation of male dynamics into Nadine’s and Manu’s identities imply a questioning of the heterocentric imagination of the body, in agreement with Martin Roberts’s words in “The Fashion Police”: “The narrative elaborates a recognizable postfeminist ideology of female emancipation through *embracing* bourgeois gender identities and the consumer culture that goes with them in contrast to the feminist rejection of them.” (244) In *Baise-moi*, the characters also appropriate certain characteristics that have traditionally been associated mainly with male performances, and are presented in clear opposition to feminist views, but Nadine and Manu’s intentions are far from being affirmative with those attitudes. They rather try to subvert them by parodically decontextualizing those actions, and appropriating them from a female subjectivity perspective.

Similarly to what happened to the main characters in *Great Expectations* and *In Memoriam to Identity*, the protagonists of *Baise-moi* are ready to perform their identities through the reterritorialization of traditionally-assigned masculine discourses, and this aim can only be achieved by putting forward a re-reading of the self as a rhizomatic structure within multiplicity. As Rosalind Gill puts it, this usurpation that parodies attitudes of what used to be considered by previous feminist trends as objectifications of women’s bodies, now offers “not just a sexualized representation, but also how alienated and objectified its terms are. A generation ago, women were fighting not to be portrayed in this objectified manner [...] Today women are willing to *present themselves* in this way” (101).

It is not my aim to resolve the tensions between traditional forms of feminism and the new theoretical narratives that emerge from the necessities postulated by both postfeminism and transfeminism. It is my goal, rather, to further reflect upon what this apparent objectification of the self as a sexual commodity means, and how it should be considered, I insist, from a perception of parody. Postfeminism and transfeminism do not intend to abolish the objectification of the female body by denying the masculine discourses that wrote their identities according to patriarchal standards. Rather, their parodic attitudes depend on the strategy of exercising individual agencies to incorporate –and, therefore, to translate– those alienating discourses into their identities so that, as Gill discusses, we would be going from a sexual objectification to a sexual subjectification of women’s identities: “the construction of new femininities organized around sexual confidence and autonomy [...] [leads to] contemporary sexualized representations

of women that do not depict women as passive objects but as knowing, active, and desiring sexual subjects” (103). As the modes of theorizing the self evolve, our critical approaches to identity and identification must also adapt in form, making postfeminist and transfeminist discourses necessarily available for the articulation of the self as a rhizomatic space of multiplicity.

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LA DISSIDENCE AU FÉMININ (1945-1989). UN DÉFI POLITIQUE DE LA POÉTIQUE FÉMININE

CORINA BOLDEANU*

ABSTRACT. *“Feminine Dissidence. A Political Challenge of Feminine Poetics”*. The paper focuses on Romanian women poetry written under the Communist Regime in order to see the influences of a totalitarian regime upon this poetry. The approach is emphasized on the writing of four poets belonging to different generations with the aim of revealing the common denominator of their work that goes in the direction of lyrical impersonalization based on ethical responsibility.

Keywords: Women Poetry, Communism, Dissidence, Ethics, Nina Cassian, Ana Blandiana, Ileana Mălăncioiu, Mariana Marin

REZUMAT. *„Disidența la feminin. O provocare politică a poeziei feminine”*. Lucrarea se concentrează asupra poeziei românești scrise de către femei în perioada regimului comunist, urmărind influențele sistemului totalitar asupra acestei poezii. Demersul vizează scrierile a patru poete aparținând unor generații diferite cu scopul degajării numitorului comun al operei lor în direcția unei impersonalizări lirice, bazată pe responsabilitatea etică.

Cuvinte cheie: Poezie scrisă de femei, Comunism, Etică, Nina Cassian, Ana Blandiana, Ileana Mălăncioiu, Mariana Marin

Si dans l'espace culturel occidental les travaux dédiés à la poésie féminine font déjà leur apparition autour des années soixante-dix, dans la littérature roumaine la question du groupement des écrivains publiées dans un même paradigme poétique attend encore d'être posée. Le retard est dû non seulement à la prolifération d'une critique profondément masculine qui trouve d'abord que «généralement les femmes ne sortent pas, en lyrique, de la confession, n'ayant que deux attitudes habituelles qui correspondent aux âges fondamentaux: une poésie de la sensation, qui exprime l'adolescence, et une poésie sentimentale, de la maternité»¹, mais aussi au fait que la littérature des femmes commence à se dresser effectivement à peine après la deuxième Guerre Mondiale, les tâtonnements hésitants de la fin du XIX^{ème} siècle étant

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¹ Nicolae Manolescu, *Literatura română postbelică*, vol. 1, Aula, Brașov, 2001, p. 76. [n.t.]

insuffisants, esthétiquement et numériquement, pour bâtir un paradigme. Au XX^{ème} siècle, ce sont les années cinquante qui changent doucement de direction sous les préceptes égalitaristes du communisme instauré en 1945, même si l'épanouissement de la création féminine ne se produira que lors des décennies suivantes, surtout pendant le «dégel idéologique» (1965-1971). Il s'agit, en fait, d'une période très favorable à l'écriture en général et à la poésie en particulier, car l'authenticité lyrique réussit enfin à surplomber les ouvrages traumatiques de la propagande réaliste-socialiste. La poésie regagne à l'époque son lyrisme perdu sous l'asepsie doctrinaire, lyrisme enrichi par la naissance des voix féminines qu'il n'avait pas connues auparavant.

Néanmoins, l'individualisation des voix poétiques par l'héritage générique d'une sensibilité particulière pose beaucoup de problèmes. D'un côté, la critique littéraire affirme résolument la spécificité de la poésie féminine en la contestant dans un premier temps par des arguments touchant à sa cohésion thématique (le bonheur du foyer, la maternité etc.). Dans un second temps, elle lui oppose des théories d'ordre biologique: «Nous n'avons pas l'intention de reprendre un débat ancien sur la légitimité ou sur l'erreur de la distinction entre la poésie féminine et l'autre poésie. En fin de compte, biologiquement, l'existence de ce chapitre de la poésie lyrique est démontrable»². Par contre, de l'autre côté, les poètes visées réagissent fermement en observant que «la poésie est une des rares notions dont le sentiment absolu ne permet pas de déterminations circonstanciées [...] Parler de la poésie féminine est aussi absurde que de parler de la poésie des nains»³. Elles demandent l'égalité du traitement critique proférant l'égalité des vécus psychiques, en exceptant tout simplement la variante la plus plausible, celle de l'égalité à travers la différence. Cette controverse, parmi la critique, sur la différenciation de la poésie féminine, bien qu'elle soit vive, ne dépasse jamais le niveau des commentaires isolés et ne se transformera pas en débat idéologique. Théoriquement, la thèse de l'universalité de la poésie féminine en tant qu'expérience essentiellement humaine convainc sans hésitation, mais, pratiquement, c'est toujours la vision spécifiante de l'écriture féminine qui est perpétuée dans le métadiscours. L'émergence tardive de la féminisation en tant que *direction* cohérente de la poésie roumaine entraîne de fait un retard dans la représentation des femmes dans le méta-discours. Ainsi, bien que la théorie de la différenciation de la poésie féminine ne soit pas partagée uniformément, c'est elle qui domine le champ de la critique littéraire. Pour ainsi dire, il y a des positions critiques qui saluent le surgissement de l'imaginaire féminin en littérature et il y a d'autres qui se montrent déçues de ce genre d'«originalité» et qui apprécient, à cet égard, l'écart de la norme, donc la poésie non-féminine des femmes. D'ailleurs, cette poésie intellectualiste, lucide, dépersonnalisée, qui fera l'objet de notre étude, n'est pas dénuée de féminité, mais des clichés que la pensée commune associe à la féminité. Un exemple éloquent et celui de la *soumission* comme attitude, que la critique croit identifier dans la plupart des vers appartenant aux

² Petru Poantă, *Modalități lirice contemporane*, Dacia, Cluj, 1973, p. 246. [n.t.]

³ Ana Blandiana, *Cine sunt eu?*, Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 2001, p. 34. [n.t.]

femmes et qui fait que les compositions étrangères à cela soient jugées pour *hiper-réalistes*, même si elles ne sont, en réalité, que légèrement impersonnelles.

La responsabilité éthique

Plus que l'impersonnalité elle-même, ce sont d'abord les raisons de l'existence de cette impersonnalité qui sont intéressantes à étudier. Un des motifs de la dépersonnalisation du moi lyrique féminin pourrait très bien être la quête d'un traitement égalitaire de la poésie féminine, autrement dit, du désir de conquérir le terrain littéraire avec les mêmes moyens que ceux qui y sont déjà arrivés, à savoir la qualité de l'écrit plutôt que le sexe de l'auteur. Les poétesses reproduisent également le modèle des poètes modernistes roumains, interdits par le communisme, redécouverts et réassimilés pendant le "dégel", synonyme d'une relâche de la censure communiste dans les années soixante. La quête d'égalité et la reproduction du modèle ne sont pas les seules causes de la neutralisation du discours féminin, causes auxquelles il convient d'ajouter l'influence du régime politique. Non seulement parce que les nécessités intrinsèques du communisme structurent la société selon des critères égalitaristes, mais surtout parce que cela contribue à une uniformisation, autant positive que négative. Positive, car le phénomène marque, pour la société roumaine, la reconnaissance des droits des femmes selon le principe de l'égalité des sexes, et négative, parce qu'il a des conséquences réductives dans le développement des gens comme individualités *sui generis*.

En ce qui concerne la littérature de la période, elle comporte, d'autant plus après la réidéologisation de 1971, une dimension irréfutable: la *responsabilité éthique*. Le mécontentement face au système totalitaire qui abolit la liberté de l'individu et qui lui impose une existence estropiée commence à modeler le visage des textes qui se tournent vers le social. Par sa nature autorisant le double sens, la poésie permet le cryptage, devenant ainsi un refuge où la *pensée dissidente* rejoint l'expression capable de tromper la censure en falsifiant les enjeux. La poésie féminine connaît très bien ce procédé et c'est exactement à cause de cette appétence pour le contexte historique qu'elle reçoit son air impersonnel, puisque, devant le monstre totalitaire, il n'y a plus le drame de la femme, ni le drame de l'homme, mais tout simplement la tragédie de l'être. En conséquence, l'effet de lucidité d'une poésie qui a renoncé à la confession frivole comme trait caractéristique réside dans l'engagement («langagement») éthique par rapport à la réalité, comprenant par cela non pas la déclamation exhaustive des abus contre l'individu, mais l'expression des vécus frissonnantes que la conscience artistique éprouve face à ces abus: «Aucune poésie politique véritable ne peut être écrite de manière propagandiste afin de convaincre «les autres» d'une atrocité ou d'une injustice [...] Car la *poésie* ne répond qu'à la nécessité du poète d'identifier ses

relations avec ces atrocités et injustices, les sources de sa douleur, crainte, furie, le sens de sa résistance»⁴.

Coupable en grande mesure pour la désentimentalisation de la poésie féminine, le problème de la responsabilité éthique s'avère donc extrêmement important. Il peut être suivi déjà dans l'oeuvre de Nina Cassian, poète qui fait ses débuts dans les années cinquante, jusqu'à présent. Cette longévité de l'oeuvre engendre pourtant des difficultés considérables, dont la plus évidente est le manque de cohésion de la vision du sujet. En fait, on peut lire dans le trajet littéraire de Nina Cassian une mutation identitaire qui va de l'engagement «en faveur de» la réalité à un engagement «par rapport à» la réalité⁵, c'est-à-dire du début réaliste-socialiste («[...] Quand je dis tout simplement, des fois/ <je suis communiste» –/ je vois avec clarté/ ma vraie identité», *Identité*⁶) à l'offensive ironique («Ma révolte linguistique/ est inutile./ L'ennemi est analphabète», *Ma révolte linguistique*⁷), avec des troublantes textes de transition qui dissèquent les répercussions assumées des actions antérieures («[...] Et pourquoi m'étonner, dans ces circonstances/ que je n'ai pas reçu des prix comme mes heureux/ collègues avec des plus claires tendances poétiques,/ que ni les chroniqueurs n'ont le temps de se cramponner/ d'une oeuvre si contradictoire/ est-ce le destin?/ où c'est l'histoire? [...]», *Autoparodie*⁸). Dans tous ces exemples, le côté référentiel est très épais, raison pour laquelle l'impression d'hyper-lucidité et de perte du lyrisme persiste.

Comme celle de Nina Cassian, la poésie de Ana Blandiana, représentante du néomodernisme littéraire des années soixante, supporte aussi la pression biographique, mais dans un sens qui consiste à assumer une culpabilité héréditaire, étant donnée la persécution d'un père «ennemi du peuple» et les prolongements d'une telle généalogie: difficulté d'accéder à l'université, interdictions de publier etc. Chez Blandiana, la conscience sociale est très vive et les exigences éthiques transpercent les poèmes, puisque, comme elle le reconnaît, «il y a certainement à travers l'histoire des moments où la littérature n'est pas un art, mais une opportunité de réflexion et, à cet instant, l'écrivain peut devenir un modèle de dignité pour le peuple»⁹. Sans spécifier dans quelle mesure la poésie écrite par un tel écrivain reste toujours de la littérature, la question soulevée par cet impératif

⁴ Adrienne Rich, *Power and Danger: Works of a Common Woman*, in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence. Selected Prose 1966-1978*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York-London, 1979, p. 251. [n.t.]

⁵ La distinction appartient à Predrag Matvejević et sépare l'écriture engagée pour le régime («en faveur de») de l'écriture engagée contre le régime («par rapport à»), in *Poetica evenimentului*, traduction en roumain par Luminița Beiu-Paladi, Univers, București, 1980.

⁶ „Când spun atât de simplu, uneori/ „sunt comunistă” –/ mi se învederează, dintre toate,/ adevărata mea identitate” (*Identitate*). [n.t.]

⁷ „Protestul meu lingvistic/ n-are putere./ Dușmanul e analfabet” (*Protestul meu lingvistic*). [n.t.]

⁸ „Și cum să mă mir, în aceste condiții/ că n-am primit premii ca prea fericirii/ colegi cu mai clare tendințe poetice./ că nici cronicarii n-au timp să se-mpiedice/ de-o operă atât de contradictorie?/ Să fie destin? Sau să fie istorie?” (*Autoparodie*). [n.t.]

⁹ Ana Blandiana, *Ibidem*, p. 43. [n.t.]

d'exemplarité renoue avec la note impersonnelle de la voix poétique féminine, car l'éthique, pour ne pas dire la moralité, est déficient par nature. Par suite de cela, la critique l'a déjà remarqué, «un thème décisif pour définir la spécificité de la poésie de Ana Blandiana s'annonce [...]: le thème de la *responsabilité éthique* [...]. D'ici, – cet air impersonnel, la parole glacée dans les formes austères du monologue qui est le poème»¹⁰. Le poème *je crois*¹¹ rend compte justement de cette qualité éthique qui, comme pour toute la poésie subversive de l'époque, risque de se transformer en défaut esthétique: «Je crois que nous sommes un peuple végétal,/ Alors d'où ce silence/ d'attendre la défoliation?/ D'où le courage/ De nous lancer sur le toboggan du sommeil/ Très proche de la mort,/ Convaincus/ Que nous serons encore capables/ De renaître?/ Je crois que nous sommes un peuple végétal –/ Qui a jamais vu/ Un arbre revolté?».

L'équilibre éthique-esthétique qui doit assurément diriger la lectures des poèmes engagés de Blandiana sera problématisé à l'intérieur de la poésie elle-même par Ileana Mălăncioiu, poète des années soixante-dix. Témoin du spectacle apathique de la réalité quotidienne, le sujet note presque télégraphiquement les ennuis généraux et y insère une constatation sur le nouveau statut de la poésie: «Le monde est toujours plus triste et plus pressé/ Le pain plus petit et plus tassé/ Sans que personne s'en aperçoive/ La poésie est descendue dans la rue.// Elle regarde une fois de tous les côtés/ Toutes les routes mènent à la même fin / Le temps de la mélancolie est passé/ Faut-il prendre quel chemin? [...]» (*Chanson*¹²). À l'ombre de ces vers, la métamorphose de la poésie apparaît plus claire: il ne s'agit plus d'un travail confessionnel, le temps de la mélancolie étant passé, mais d'une descente dans la rue, d'une démocratisation, pour ainsi dire, de la création littéraire à cause des transformations contextuelles.

La même vision, mais encore plus combative, sera développée finalement dans la poésie post-moderniste, malgré l'esprit ludique et l'affabilité suspensive qui semblaient caractériser le courant. Mariana Marin fait preuve d'une conscience littéraire incessamment éveillée et, après avoir convenu un pacte éditorial pour que ses poèmes surmontent la censure – l'éditeur l'a conseillée de choisir le «masque» de Anne Frank et de mettre les vers sous le toit de la révolte ... antifasciste – , donne cours à des méditations très précises sur la condition de la poésie dans un régime totalitaire: «Que les mots me viennent facilement, Anne,/ quand j'écris sur toi,/ sur ton journal nommé Kitty, sur ta soeur Margot./ Que c'était difficile auparavant!/ La chose est d'avoir un sentiment,/ une cause juste et de vouloir

¹⁰ Ion Pop, *Poezia unei generații*, Dacia, Cluj, 1973, p. 250. [n.t.]

¹¹ „Eu cred că suntem un popor vegetal./ De unde altfel liniștea/ În care așteptăm desfrunzirea?/ De unde curajul/ De-a ne da drumul pe toboganul somnului/ Până aproape de moarte./ Cu siguranța/ Că vom mai fi în stare să ne naștem/ Din nou?/ Eu cred că suntem un popor vegetal –/ Cine-a văzut vreodată un copac revoltându-se?” (*eu cred*). [n.t.]

¹² „Lumea e tot mai tristă și mai grăbită/ Pâinea e tot mai scurtă și mai turtită/ Fără ca nimeni s-o vadă/ Poezia a coborât în stradă.// Se uită-n toate părțile deodată/ Orice drum tot acolo duce/ Timpul melancoliei a trecut/ Ea încotro s-o apuce. [...]” (*Cântec*). [n.t.]

vivre./ Puis le poème ancre ses racines dans la terre./ sépare avec la baguette de noisetier/ ce qu'il y a de ce ce que nous sommes/ et après les mélange./ Le poème est un être démocrate./ Un être moral./ Il lève la tête/ même sous les bottes en marche» (*Racines*¹³). D'ailleurs, Mariana Marin souligne constamment les valences éthiques du travail artistique en lui reconnaissant une nécessité vitale et démonte en même temps, par anticipation, les possibles reproches qu'un tel travail enraciné dans le sol du réel pourrait recevoir: «[...] Où est la génération/ qui me raconte/ comme je confonds l'éthique et l'esthétique?» (*A. F. parle*¹⁴). La concession reste pourtant inéluctable.

Le sérieux féminin

Sans doute, le parcours dans ce secteur engagé, voire «dissident», de la poésie féminine roumaine des années cinquante jusqu'aux années quatre-vingt semble révéler très peu de «féminité». Aucune de ces poètes ne résiste au défi historique et cet «abandon» finit par compromettre le spécifique de l'imaginaire traditionnel féminin. Comme Nicolae Manolescu l'a signalé, «[...] une thèse possible serait que: la façon dont le politique provoque l'écriture féminine est une écriture profondément lucide, masculine, déféminisante, glacée etc.»¹⁵. Avec, peut-être, une brève observation: c'est la *réponse* de la poétique féminine au défi politique qui est lucide, masculine, déféminisante et ainsi de suite.

Toutefois, l'impersonnalisation de cette poésie n'est pas totale. Il y a, bien sûr, un dénuement lyrique tributaire à l'influence politique («[...] quelqu'un me disait/ que depuis un certain temps je manque de lyrisme./ Qu'aurais-je pu lui répondre?/ Je suis une poétesse de gauche./ car de la gauche est venu/ aussi le sentiment que je suis étouffée de misère [...]», Mariana Marin, *Lettres à Emile*¹⁶), une sécheresse de marqueurs de la féminité, mais il y a aussi une adhérence manifeste au *sérieux* comme manière particulièrement féminine d'évaluer le tableau de la vie sociale. Il ne faut pas comprendre par cela que le *sérieux* est une attitude exclusivement féminine dont les poètes hommes seraient étrangers, mais que, face au contexte politique restrictif et injuste la poésie subversive des femmes se tourne vers le sérieux (parfois vers le tragique), tandis que la poésie iconoclaste des hommes évolue vers

¹³ „Ce ușor îmi vin cuvintele, Anne,/ când scriu despre tine,/ despre jurnalul tău numit Kitty, despre sora ta Margot./ Ce chin era până acum!/ Totul e să ai un sentiment./ o cauză dreaptă și să vrei să trăiești./ Poemul își înfige atunci rădăcinile în pământ./ desparte cu nuielușa de alun/ ceea ce e de ceea ce suntem/ și-apoi le adună./ Poemul e o ființă democrată./ O ființă morală./ Lui îi crește capul/ chiar și sub cizmele-n marș” (*Rădăcini*). [n.t.]

¹⁴ „[...] Unde o fi generația/ să-mi povestească/ despre cum confund eu eticul cu esteticul?” (*Vorbește A.F.*). [n.t.]

¹⁵ Nicolae Manolescu, *Poezie programatică*, in „România Literară”, nr. 5/1981, p. 7.

¹⁶ „[...] cineva îmi spunea/ că de la o vreme îmi lipsește lirismul/ Ce i-aș fi putut răspunde?/ Eu sunt o poetă de stânga./ pentru că de la stânga a venit/ și sentimentul că sunt sufocată de mizerie [...]” (*Scrisorile către Emil*). [n.t.]

le nonsérieux (ironie, même comique): «[...]j'ai noté à plusieurs reprises la bizarrerie que les poétesses soient plus „sérieuses” que les poètes»¹⁷.

Victimes d'une impuissance partagée, harcelés par l'injustice d'un présent éternel, les écrivains critiquent eux aussi le système dont ils sont les prisonniers, mais pas de la même façon. Leurs attaques se construisent sur des principes ludiques, obliquement, à travers l'ironie qui fonctionne comme mécanisme confortable de transmission détournée de sens. Geo Dumitrescu, Marin Sorescu, Mircea Dinescu, pour ne citer que ceux-là, font appel à l'ironie dans leur essai de bousculer l'ordre pétrifié du pouvoir. D'autres jouent les clowns et miment la folie, déléguant au lecteur l'effort de dégager la vérité cachée sous le masque de leurs paroles. Cependant, quelle que ce soit la méthode, ces poètes n'atriègnent pas la solennité accablante des poétesses; pour conclure sur cette séparation majeure, un texte de Marin Sorescu et un autre de Ana Blandiana – les deux appartiennent à la même génération – renvoyant au dictateur sont exemplaires: «Un malvoyant lisait le futur/ Et au futur il voyait un aveugle./ Et l'aveugle dans son futur/ Voyait un sourd-muet soûl./ Qui lui aussi prophétisait:/ Votre maître est balbutié./ Et comme un bègue toute sa vie/ Balbutiera à l'infini» (*Prophéties*¹⁸) versus «Nous parlons toujours de lui/ Comme toujours/ On touche avec la langue la dent qui fait mal/ C'est la fête si pour un instant on l'oublie/ Il est mentionné incessamment/ Dans les malédictions autant que dans les oraisons./ On le prend chaque jour/ Comme un poison/ Dont on devient immuns» (*sans nom*¹⁹). Par cette comparaison, extensible à plusieurs thèmes, il devient pourtant clair que la différence de registre trahit un décalage de réaction qui, loin de pouvoir être soulevé au niveau de règle générale, mérite d'être pris en considération, puisqu'il traduit la dominante attitudinale de chaque «camp» en ouvrant la discussion vers l'histoire des sensibilités.

De ce point de vue, il serait très intéressant de continuer la comparaison entre les deux types de discours, au moins parce que la position des *raisonneurs* comporte un rare attribut: celui de l'égalité des rôles. Pour bien comprendre cela, une incursion dans l'histoire des mentalités pourrait être éclairante en ce qui concerne le doublet agent/patient qui a depuis toujours caractérisé la relation homme/femme. Toutefois, prouver qu'à travers le temps, au milieu de toute société, l'homme a accompli le rôle d'agent, alors que la femme a incarné celui de patient relèverait du truisme. Mais dire que le régime communiste s'est assimilé en tant que système répressif, à la fonction d'agent, imposant aux gens, sans aucune distinction, celle de patient c'est déjà différent. Même s'il est vrai que le système

¹⁷ Nicolae Manolescu, *Literatura română postbelică*, vol. 1, Aula, Braşov, 2001, p. 385. [n.t.]

¹⁸ „Un orb vedea în viitor/ Şi-n viitor vedea un chior./ Şi chioru-n viitorul lui/ Vedea un surdo-mut, beat-cui./ Care şî el proorocea:/ Vă paşte-un bâlbâit zicea./ Şi bâlbâitul, în sfârşit,/ S-o bâlbâi la infinit” (*Proorociri*). [n.t.]

¹⁹ „Vorbm de el mereu/ Cum tot mereu/ Atingi cu limba dintele ce doare./ Când îl uităm o clipă-i sărbătoare./ Iar pomenirea lui bolnavă/ E şî-n blesteme şî în rugăciuni./ Îl luăm în doze zilnice/ Ca pe-o otravă/ La care devenim astfel imuni” (*fără nume*). [n.t.]

est, à son tour, soutenu par des gens, n'étant pas un concept abstrait, il est aussi vrai que ceux qui n'en font pas partie restent des patients. Cette constatation se vérifie aisément dans la poésie subversive où le sujet renverse à ses propres moyens (sérieux/nonsérieux) la pression qu'il subit. Un autre parallèle, de Mircea Dinescu et Ileana Mălăncioiu, poètes des années soixante-dix, souligne pleinement cette identité de statut: «Que fais-tu littérature?/ Tu troubles quelques jeunes ridicules en province/ [...] et tu ne vois pas au fond de la cour/ le criminel chatouiller sa victime[...]» (*Le mort factice*²⁰) et «Un crime dans la rue principale/ En plein jour, un crime terrible/ Et personne ne pleure et personne ne hurle/ Et personne n'attrape le criminel// Moi même je reste ici et j'écris des vers/ Comme si mes vers pourraient empêcher/ Un crime dans la rue principale/ En plein jour// [...]» (*Un crime dans la rue principale*²¹).

Un refus avéré

De ce rapprochement illustratif il vaut retenir la réduction au même statut de patient opérée par le politique, puisqu'elle soutient l'égalisation des voix poétiques et renforce la thèse de l'impersonnalisation de la création féminine dûe aussi, entre autres, au facteur contextuel. Nonobstant, comme on l'a déjà souligné auparavant, l'impersonnalisation n'est pas totale, car le discours féminin garde encore des indices très intimes. De ce point de vue la poésie sensuelle de quelques poétesses peut être lue comme manière personnelle de répondre à l'impersonnalisation. De même, la question de la maternité – que la critique avait considérée, depuis toujours, définissante pour la poésie lyrique féminine et dont cette poésie désentimentalisée semblait être dénuée – est abordée par les poètes analysés ci-dessus, mais avec des modelages particuliers. Bien évidemment, le travail poétique de ce motif supporte pareillement la détermination historique, une détermination affreusement inique, qui prive les femmes à l'époque du droit de l'avortement. Très délicat, le problème se reflète dans l'oeuvre, dans la mesure où le message dissident (la femme qui réproouve l'interdiction de ses droits, qui refuse l'expérience de la maternité etc.) reste à mi-distance entre l'implicite et l'explicite: «Tout un peuple/ À naître/ Condamné à la naissance/ Un foetus à côté de l'autre/ Tout un peuple/ Qui n'entend pas, qui ne voit pas, qui ne comprend pas/ Mais qui se fraye chemin/ À travers les corps spasmodiques des femmes/ À travers le sang des mères/ Éludées»

²⁰ „Ce faci tu, literatură?/ Tulburi câțiva tineri caraghioși în provincie/ [...] și nu vezi în curtea interioară/ criminalul cum își gădilă victima [...]” (*Mortul fățarnic*). [n.t.]

²¹ „O crimă săvârșită pe strada principală/ În amiaza mare, o crimă oribilă/ Și nimeni nu plânge și nimeni nu strigă/ Și nimeni nu pune mâna pe criminal.// Eu însămi stau aici și scriu versuri/ Ca și cum versurile mele ar putea opri/ O crimă săvârșită pe strada principală/ În plină zi// [...]” (*O crimă săvârșită pe strada principală*). [n.t.]

(Ana Blandiana, *La croisade des enfants*²²). Quittant la constatation grave, la fronde discursive tourne, dans la poésie des années quatre-vingt, vers une résignation orgueilleuse du refus d'être mère dans un contexte historique malveillant: «Entre nous il ne sont restés/ que ces enfants de papier/ qu'on fait traverser la rue chaque matin./ Mon refus de perpétuer ainsi l'espèce./ Mon refus d'être une autre maison de la mort/ Sous un tel temps» (Mariana Marin, *La maison de la mort*²³). De ce point de vue, si le fait qu'aucune de ces quatre poètes n'a connu, dans son existence biographique, la maternité n'est, probablement, qu'une simple coïncidence. Mais cela n'empêche que l'intensité de la négation reste, à travers le temps, authentique.

À défaut de conclusion

Au bout de cette incursion dans la poésie féminine subversive produite sous l'époque communiste, la littérature roumaine éclaire son visage. Elle reconnaît la démocratisation des voix lyriques sous l'autorité asphyxiante du totalitarisme et accomplit sa personnalité. Versants opposés mais complémentaires d'un même sommet, les poésies masculines et féminines sont étroitement imbriquées, même si le contexte politique les condamne à l'uniformisation. Pourtant, en ce qui concerne la poésie et l'identité du sujet lyrique, l'impersonnalisation est la conséquence de cette pression écrasante, mais cela ne signifie pas que la poésie féminine soit indistincte. Au delà de la perte de sa nature confessionnelle et des «petits» motifs d'une sensibilité futile, elle revendique le pouvoir d'accéder résolument aux grands thèmes de l'existence dans l'Histoire. Finalement, la poésie féminine ne perd pas sa féminité, mais en acquiert une autre. Celle de la conscience sociale éveillée.

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²² „Un întreg popor/ Nenăscut încă/ Dar condamnat la naștere./ Foetus lângă foetus./ Un întreg popor/ Care n-aude, nu vede, nu înțelege./ Dar înaintează/ Prin trupuri zvârcolite de femei./ Prin sânge de mame/ Neîntrebate.” (*Cruciada copiilor*). [n.t.]

²³ „Între noi n-au mai rămas/ decât acești copii de hârtie/ pe care dimineța îi traversăm strada./ Refuzul meu de-a continua astfel specia./ Refuzul meu de a fi o altă casă a morții/ pe astfel de vremuri” (*Casa morții*). [n.t.]

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FROM CENTRE TO MARGINS: SOUTH AFRICA MEETS THE ARAB WORLD

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ABSTRACT. *“From Centre to Margins: South Africa Meets the Arab World”*. The paper analyses the new perspectives in Nadine Gordimer’s writings, focusing on her 2001 novel *The Pickup*. The concepts of home, relocation and cultural diversity are examined as they represent the key factors defining the two communities presented in the novel: South Africa and the Arab world.

Keywords: relocation, home, Arab world, South Africa, cultural diversity

REZUMAT. *„Dinspre centru către margini: Africa de Sud întâlnește lumea arabă”*. Lucrarea analizează noile perspective propuse de Nadine Gordimer în romanul *„La agățat”*. Următoarele concepte sunt întâlnite în scriitura lui Gordimer și examinate în acest studiu: casă și acasă, diversitate culturală și strămutare/deplasare, deoarece acestea reprezintă factorii cheie în conturarea celor două comunități prezentate în roman: Africa de Sud și lumea arabă.

Cuvinte cheie: strămutare/ deplasare, casă/ acasă, lumea arabă, Africa de Sud, diversitate culturală

Nadine Gordimer is considered “an interpreter of South Africa” and, during the process to end Apartheid, Stephen Clingman (1992:137) asked her: “Once Apartheid is abolished entirely, do you think there will still be something for you to write about?” Indeed, replacing Apartheid themes and subject matters in the new South Africa has been a demanding task for the writers who used to write from the margins and who are now at the centre of the world. Having grown up in the post-colonial South Africa and having lived through the various stages of its Apartheid regime, Nadine Gordimer has analysed what Apartheid, this extreme form of governing based on the principles of ‘divide and rule’ and ‘separate development’, did to people. After the abolition of Apartheid laws, her protest was directed towards the attacks of both white and black military groups on civil

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population, towards the violence that has situated South African cities on top of the list of towns having the highest crime rate in the world. The novels *None to Accompany Me* (1994), *The House Gun* (1998) and *The Pickup* (2001) belong to what Gordimer calls the 'post-Apartheid literature of transition'. The first two novels concentrate on violence and its consequences in the new South Africa, whereas *The Pickup* illustrates Gordimer's change of focus from the African to the Arabian world introducing new themes and issues (such as displacement, economic exile, and alienation) along with the ones used in her previous works (migration, freedom, identity, 'the Self and the Other' theme).

Many analysts of Gordimer's work have noticed her concern with the new South African social and political context correlated with the new world order imposed by the concept of globalisation. Ileana Dimitriu (2006:159-160) has noted Gordimer's engagement in the 1990s with the concept of 'civil imaginary'. The critic has also underlined Gordimer's new preoccupation with private life "as not being inextricably linked to the public domain", which "can be seen in retrospect, to signal a kind of liberation from the burden of excessive social responsibility within large historical events". The South African writer has resisted the temptation "to turn, or return, to the imaginative and literary circles of the northern hemisphere". In turn, J. M. Coetzee (2007:255) remarks that Gordimer "has been exercised by the question of her own place, present and future, in history" since the beginning of her career.

However, in my opinion, her post-Apartheid novels, short stories and essays, maintain Gordimer's position of a white citizen and woman writer fighting for human rights, in general, not only for Black people's rights. It is not a feeling of relief that can be detected when reading her novels, a relief that society has defeated Apartheid rule (the abolition of Apartheid does not erase her responsibility to confront social and racial issues from her work) and that history has made an important step beyond oppression of non-white South African people. It is rather an impression that the new South Africa has more social than political issues to solve, more races and ethnicities to tolerate and integrate in this new post-Apartheid, postcolonial, multicultural and multiracial era. The new world order has imposed a new approach to social issues and Gordimer has complied with the new rules, especially because they were amended as she has predicted they would be:

The nurture of our writers, our literature, is a priority which should not create for us a closed-shop African 'world literature', a cultural exclusivity in place of the exclusion, even post-colonial, that has kept us in an ante-room of self-styled 'world literatures'. (Gordimer 2000:28)

The point of departure for *The Pickup* is the new South Africa and its usual problems of race, class, bureaucracy and the connection between the private and the political life. These problems are taken from a local to a global level, with the setting changing from liberal post-Apartheid Johannesburg to an Arab country which she does not name: any country having a desert and a Muslim people could

represent the setting of her novel. Another theme is that of interracial love related to the 'Self and Other' theme (on both a cultural and an individual level) and extends from the racial opposition Black versus White used by Gordimer in all her novels, to the cultural one. Gordimer addresses the issues of identity and belonging connected to the notions of home and exile, emigration and immigration, and the way they affect the Self and the Other. Her interest in the phenomenon of immigration is due to the reactions of resentment and xenophobia that it triggers. In this respect, she has joined the writers around the world in an attempt to raise awareness and diminish the negative manifestations against immigrants.

The immigrant is situated at the center of the novel and the issues of nomadism and relocation are explored. People from less developed countries take advantage of South Africa's regeneration and consider it a habitat that offers better working conditions and decent residence. For the new generation of South Africans, the reconstruction of their country implies distancing themselves from the past and their families, whether they live in the ghettos or in the white Suburbs.

The Pickup is seen by Coetzee (2007:251) as "Gordimer's personal odyssey" due to the characters she has chosen to explore. Thus, one can distinguish the portrayal of the "confused and conflicted young man, emotionally bound to his mother", disregarding the "history and culture that have formed him". Then, there is the "unexceptional young woman who trusts her impulses and finds herself by humbling herself". It is arguable whether one can read humiliation in her attitude to please the others or simply a desire to integrate. Nevertheless, both characters expect a remake of the Self that should take place when they relocate to a new country.

The novel reminds of an older short story, "Some Are Born to Sweet Delight", from the 1991 collection, *Jump*. In the story, a young South African woman falls in love with a man from an unnamed Islamic country, gets pregnant, and leaves South Africa to meet his family. The man is one of those foreigners who are always together but look alone, with a "strange expression of a caged animal, far from wherever it belonged" (2003:720). The woman receives a toy as gift from her husband -- a toy containing a bomb that destroys the plane. The bomb is used to make a statement "in some complication of vengeance for holy wars, land annexation, invasions, imprisonments, cross-border raids, territorial disputes, bombings, sinkings, kidnappings no one outside the initiated could understand". And the innocent woman "had taken them all, taken the baby inside her; down, along with her happiness" (88).

The novel starts with what seems to be a romance at first glance. The similarity with the short story ends at this point, as Gordimer prefers not to present the violent side of the Arab world but to insist on a peaceful multicultural and multiracial 'global village'. Julie Summers meets Abdu, falls in love with him and decides to follow him back to his country when his work permit expires. If the love story is simple, the presentation of the two countries is elaborate; Gordimer characterizes them using her characters' thoughts and feelings and the events that take place in the characters' lives either as citizens or as immigrants. Both Julie and

Abdu change identities from resident to emigrant and immigrant (Julie goes from South Africa to the Arabian country, Abdu from the Arabian country to South Africa, then back to his homeland and then, away from it, to America).

Julie meets Abdu on the streets of Johannesburg, when her car breaks down, causing a traffic jam. The mechanic who offers to help her decides that it is impossible to repair it and that the best solution would be to buy a new one. The search for the new vehicle brings them together on several occasions, enabling her to learn that he has a degree in Economics in his unnamed country of origin. His stay in South Africa is illegal, as his work permit has expired and it is not likely that he could obtain a renewal. They become lovers and Abdu is introduced to Julie's friends at the EL-AY café – also known as the Table, because their favourite pastime is to sit around a table, have some drinks and chat. When, Abdu receives the deportation order, Julie reconnects with her wealthy family in order to procure some money and a work permit. Unfortunately, she does not succeed in prolonging his stay and makes her final decision to accompany him back to his family in his natal village. Motivated by his mother and her position in the Arab community, Abdu decides he must marry Julie before leaving South Africa. As for Julie, she is unaware of the responsibilities of a wife and daughter-in-law in a Muslim family, but, at the same time, she is enthusiastic about visiting an exotic country.

Julie - the rich white daughter of a well-known businessman - detests the suburbs of her childhood and, above all, the privileges that the suburbs have to offer. She now lives in a “series of backyard cottages adapted from servants’ quarters” (2001:8), which she sees as a radical departure from her father’s house, but which, in fact, is not because leaving the Suburbs to live in a black neighbourhood and going to clubs in Soweto (the black neighbourhood where bloody Johannesburg riots started on several occasions during the Apartheid years) on Saturday nights has become a norm in the new South Africa. Julie considers that her ‘place’ was sufficiently remote from the Suburbs’ ostentation and “was accepted by the blacks among them as the kind of place they themselves moved to from the old segregation” (18).

The white South African girl is exploring an unknown territory (the desert), on a quest for her true self, whereas the Arab man is displaced from his territory, removed from his home and compelled to deal with the Other for economic reasons. Julie is “the right kind of foreigner: one who belonged to the internationally acceptable category of origin” (140); and, for this reason, she is able to choose ‘one of her own kind’ at any time, a kind to which she decides whether she belongs or not (80).

In opposition to Julie, who is entitled to alternatives, Abdu’s living conditions are specific to an immigrant: he inhabits the room “redolent of fuel and grease” (28) above the garage where he works, thanks to the owner of the garage. His childhood village that he was so eager to leave is surrounded by desert and, from his point of view, the desert means nothing but silence and desolation. His only choice is to depart without being able to opt where to settle down. He takes what he is given as long as he is away from the silence of the desert, listening to

“the lullaby of distant traffic” (34). Furthermore, Abdu’s experience of life is full of contradictions, migration and multiple return and removal, on account of the fact that his life as an immigrant unfolds in a multitude of communities worldwide. He does not like to speak about his country or his home and Julie does not learn anything about it before the moment she sets foot on the airport. He has no photographs of his family or his village and the only description he provides is that of a person who wants to detach himself from the world of his childhood.

Although Julie despises her father’s capitalistic values and privileged lifestyle, and even the “beautiful terrace of her father’s house” that “she didn’t care to call...home” (45), it is exactly to her father’s lifestyle that Abdu aspires. Julie, the ‘*insider*’ to the South African white liberal and bourgeois lifestyle wants out, wants to break loose; Abdu, ‘the *outsider*’, who belongs to a third world country, wants in, he wants to be accepted and somehow integrate, although he is considered “the one from outside who has been let in” (19).

Regardless of the fact that her family and friends see him as a disguised ‘grease monkey’ without a name, working at a garage, Julie sees him as her ‘oriental prince’, an *exotic Other*. The Arab man accepts the two identities and acts accordingly, depending on the social situations he encounters. He even assumes the nickname he is given, when thinking about himself, admitting “there is no longer any sense in playing the grease-monkey” (92), and he feels like a prince with a spell cast upon him every time he is able to free himself from his monkey suit, that is his working overalls.

The ‘outcast’ Abdu without family and friends represents the mirrored image of Julie’s ideal of independence. Abdu does not understand her reluctance when he asks to meet her family, especially her father, or when he needs help to get his visa. Julie cannot ignore her principles and her embarrassment in order to confront her father and help Abdu in his struggle to avoid deportation - an omission she tries to rectify by accompanying Abdu on his return home. In Abdu’s country, the roles are reversed: Julie cannot understand his detachment from the family, his performance of everyday tasks and duties without completely identifying. She manages to find the ideal environment she has been searching for - free of any constraints – and thus, fully integrates in Abdu’s family:

You must understand, I’ve never lived in a family before, just made substitutes out of other people, ties, I suppose, though I didn’t realize that. There are ... things... between people here, that are important, no, necessary to them. (187)

Using Abdul R. JanMohamed’s comments on the function of racial differences, Abdu may be seen as the ‘savage’ who has already been civilized and is now searching for a place in the civilized world that refuses to accept its final product. Julie is part of the reverse process: the colonizer returning to the primitive world to discover its essence. The colonizer’s moral superiority is questioned, as well as the validity of her own formation and the social rules of the South African

society. Unlike her family and friends, Julie is prepared to understand “the worthless alterity of the colonised”, to value the differences of his society, although she will try to change its mentality and teach her language and culture, at the same time, respecting the others and their ‘otherness’. In her attempt not to judge the Other according to her own cultural values, Julie “assumes that the Other is irremediably different”, and she finds it impossible to adopt his point of view (JanMohamed 1985:65). For example, her perspective of the desert is entirely different from the Arab’s view: Julie seeks to understand and tame the desert, whereas Abdu wants to escape from it.

Julie gives English lessons to the girls in the Arabian village in exchange for Arabic lessons. Although she does not know from the beginning of her arrival that she wants to remain there, she considers it both as her duty and as a way of paying respect to the community that hosts her. The Arab girls are also interested in speaking English as they perceive the new language not as an intruder or a possible menace to their own language and culture but as a form of education, of learning more about the world outside their house, beyond the desert. Julie realizes that it is difficult to understand the emphatic and metaphoric language of her mother-in-law, just as her husband has had difficulties with official English. In fact, Julie influences the girls “with her rich girl’s Café ideas of female independence” (2001:256). Little boys are also her students as they have greater chances of leaving home than girls, and they might study in high schools in the capital city of the country.

As far as Abdu is concerned, the question of blackness poses itself in an even more complex way, as he is of Arab, not of African descent, “not one of them” (87), but the one with glossy dark hair unable to speak Afrikaans like white and black people. If Julie’s father’s thought when seeing him was “What was the immediate register? Black or some sort of black” (41), the owner of the garage where he worked went further into this manifestation of passive racism. As a matter of fact, there is “an already pronounced evaluative judgment” and “an implicit program of action (Said 1994:207) when residents of the Suburbs make the acquaintance of Julie’s partner:

As a white father of daughters himself, it was a shame to see what she was doing with this fellow from God knows where, nothing against him, but still. [...] and it’s the other kind, the real blacks who get what’s going nowadays. (Gordimer 2001:31-32)

By contrast, the question of Julie’s whiteness in the unnamed Arab country is not even mentioned in the second part of the novel, nor does it seem to be a distinguishing feature in the Arab society described.

Julie also defines herself in opposition to the culture of her past. She, like Abdu, is ashamed of her family living in the snobbish society of the Suburbs. At first, she finds her own identity by choosing to be different from the bourgeois

world of her parents, fabricating herself a 'home' in the social circle of liberal friends at the EL-AY Café. From the 'game' that she calls her life in this café, which is no more than a "doll's house" where she and her friends "were playing at reality" (164), she faces the reality of poverty and respect. After that, Julie locates herself in her physical relationship with Abdu, which she describes as "the kind of love-making that is another country" (96). In order to maintain this sense of location, Julie relocates with Abdu - now re-named Ibrahim ibn Musa - to his desert country, although her relocation comes "out of ignorance, innocence of reality" (96). Traveling to this impoverished country and settling down gives Julie a consciousness of self that makes her seem "strangely new to herself" (117). Once again, she has found 'home'.

Her radical decision to accompany Abdu to his hometown and give up every privilege she is offered as a middle-class white person in South Africa is the consequence of the liberal views of the post-Apartheid society. The liberal world forces Julie to see the true Other in order to rediscover herself. Arriving at the airport and meeting some natives, she still feels "as strange to herself as she was to them: she was what they saw" (117). Afterwards, her relationships with the Arab women allow her to find a position within their culture.

While Abdu/Ibrahim sees in his own Arabic-Islamic culture, a prison he desperately wants to escape from, Julie discovers here what she has been missing in the liberal 'New South Africa': traditional values such as commitment, solidarity, family, spirituality. He is ashamed of his country's images, of his people and his legacy – the Arab name that introduces him as a specific Other, and which he would exchange with the nickname 'grease monkey' at any time. By contrast, Julie enjoys every moment of her new life in the Arab village and, despite "the sheds and buildings either half-completed or half-fallen down" (128), she recognizes the illustrations of her childhood's Scheherazade stories brought to life by two old men smoking a water-pipe.

Julie's final journey towards her true identity is through the desert. Her regular walks to the end of the village where the desert starts are accompanied by hours of watching the cold and immobile sand, giving her optical illusions from time to time, such as the woman with a herd of goats but without a pasture for them. She feels a compulsory need for water: "when you thirst, in the sands, water takes on a new meaning; it's an element that has no place" (168). She feels that the desert and everything it represents is one of the factors that help construct her new Self, the "perception of herself formed in – by" Abdu's village and his people (197).

Evidently, there are two different views of the desert: for Abdu, it is simply "this dusty hell of my place", a portrait of silence and desolation, a lack of shapes and movement, "the denial of everything he yearns for, for him" (262) whereas for Julie, it signifies "no measure of space, no demarcation from land to air". It is the symbol of eternity because it is not affected by the change of "seasons of bloom and decay", and it bears no prints of the past or the present (172-3). As Meier

(2003) observes, the border between the desert and the village becomes 'a room of her own' at the border of the civilized world. When approaching this deserted realm, Julie finally seems to find meaning in her life, to understand that she has reached the final destination of her journey. This meaning manifests itself in a dream of green. Although initially Julie does not understand this vision (whereas Abdu simply misinterprets it), it suddenly gains meaning when she sees a rice plantation in the middle of the desert and decides to invest money, work and hope to cultivate the land. Her admiration for the desert is contrasted to his aversion towards it: she spends her mornings watching the barren area, while he prefers to avoid it. Finally, the same opposition is found in their attitudes toward life: she completely rejects the bourgeois world she has left behind and cannot understand Abdu's need for objects and money when they could be self-sufficient: "What else is really worth having out there in the world of false gods' apart from a family?" (Gordimer 2001:205).

Abdu's and Julie's quest for identity is transported by Nadine Gordimer on a higher level and their questions about love, identity, freedom and responsibility remain yet to be answered just as the African world and the Arab world are searching for a new identity.

The first thing that strikes Julie on her arrival in the Arab world is not the fact that women must wear a scarf on their head or must be accompanied every time they go out; it is the desert that fascinates her and that plays an important part in her decision not to leave her Arab family when her husband obtains the entry visa for the U.S.A. For Abdu the desert represents nothingness and the English-speaking countries are "where the world is" (230). For Julie, the desert and the ghostly woman pasturing her goats in the middle of the immensity of sand become an obsession. She dreams of green and of buying a small part in an oasis where she can grow rice. She dreams of changing the place, but she does not understand that the desert is eternal. Her husband tries to force her back into reality and tells her that the real money in the Arabian countries is made from selling and buying weapons. However, the violent side of the Arabian world is not presented in this novel.

One similarity that can be found between the two worlds is the role of women, which is that of child-bearers and mothers. The image of African women carrying their babies on their backs or holding white children's hands on their way back from school overlaps with the image of the Arabian women gathered inside the house under the leadership of their mother-in-law waiting for their sons to be born and trying to find the best man/ provider for their daughters. The men from both cultures are at work - the Africans either in the mines or in towns as servants, the Arabs on the oil fields or abroad. The only apparent difference between the two cultures is the leader of the community: an older man in the case of South Africa, an older woman in the case of the Arabian countries.

Julie's displacement is the beginning of her journey from the Self to the Other. Her identity is constituted by a series of choices and the relationships

between the Self and the Other. In the end, Abdu no longer represents that 'significant Other' as Julie can no longer relate to his choices and future achievements in the Western world. The writing of the Self on the Other and the writing of the Other on the Self have as effect the 'unfixed identities' of the characters. The Other in their relationship is both to be desired and to be suppressed.

The fact that Gordimer has been interested in power shifts that occur when people become displaced from their patterned life is noticeable in all her novels, without exception. Thus, *The Pickup* presents a world of "unfixed identities" (Dimitriu Sora 2006:167), an asymmetrical world of "skewed power relations" (169) in a post-Apartheid South Africa that has to redefine its identity in order to enter the 'global village'. The intercultural marriage is Gordimer's 'silver lining' for the postcolonial world, just as interracial marriages were for the colonial period. Barbara Temple-Thurston (1999:116) observed that "[T]he multitude and flux of cultures or subcultures based on race, ethnicity, class or gender in South Africa – each with their own discourse that may or may not challenge the dominant discourse – result in a complex and confusing society with no cultural unanimity". *The Pickup* is a novel that exemplifies the importance of cultural diversity for troubled societies, in Gordimer's case, the South African and Arabian communities.

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THE GOVERNING DYNAMICS OF PATRIARCHY IN AHDAF SOUEIF'S *IN THE EYE OF THE SUN*

FOUAD MAMI¹

ABSTRACT. “*The Governing Dynamics of Patriarchy in Ahdaf Soueif’s In the Eye of the Sun*”. Perhaps of direct relevance to the social status of Arab women is the experience of Egyptian women proposed by the contemporary Egyptian novelist, writing in English, Ahdaf Soueif. In *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992), Soueif tells the story of modern, educated and middle-class Egyptian women as they bump and fall in their marriages but ultimately win their paths towards some satisfying degree of self-understanding. Soueif’s drama does not claim to be totally successful in subverting patriarchal mindsets. Instead, the author seems to have fairly gained insights at the dynamics fueling patriarchy in today’s Arab cultural climate.

Keywords: Patriarchy, phallocracy, epistemic conditioning, societal presumptions and expectations, social code.

REZUMAT. „*Dinamismul guvernator al patriarhiei în In the Eye of the Sun de Ahdaf Soueif*”. Probabil că experiența femeilor egiptene înfățișată de scriitoarea egipteană contemporană Ahdaf Soueif, scriitoare de limbă engleză, este în legătură directă cu statutul social al femeilor din lumea arabă. În “*In the Eye of the Sun*” (1992), Soueif spune povestea femeilor egiptene moderne, educate, de clasă medie, care se izbesc de problemele mariajului și eșuează, ca mai apoi să își găsească calea spre descoperirea de sine. Drama lui Soueif nu are pretenția de-a fi reușit să submineze întru-totul mentalitatea patriarhală; în schimb, autoarea pare să fi ajuns la o înțelegere desăvârșită a dinamicii ce stimulează climatul cultural arab contemporan.

Cuvinte cheie: patriarhie, condiționare epistemică, prezumții și așteptări sociale, normă socială.

Introduction

May be the sheer length (more than 800 pages in most editions) of *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992), by the Egyptian novelist Ahdaf Soueif, signals an ambitious project to write what can be called the Egyptian equivalent to Leo Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* (1869) or Margret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind* (1935). For the story of Asya al-Ulama, at varying degrees, evokes the mythical heights and rivals the

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experiences of the characters of these two legendary novels. As it is a novel that engages with war and peace, *In the Eye of the Sun* attempts to trace the reasons that underlie Arab armies' defeat in the June 1967 war against Israel. According to Soueif, the defeat has to be explained in terms other than only military, political or logistical shortcomings. Instead, a wider and more objective perspective as the one proposed by the protagonist of *In the Eye of the Sun* indicates that such failures are but symptoms for a deeper and intricate dysfunctioning within Arab identity and selfhood. As readers leaf through Soueif's novel, it becomes clear that rampant but implicit or socially unacknowledged patriarchal modes of thinking that characterize present Arab culture infest such culture and turn it vulnerable to sweeping tensions both from within and without. As this article tries to illustrate, there exists in the novel enough evidence to claim that Ahdaf Soueif is determined to uncover the dynamics that fuels patriarchy and shape its inhibitive momentum in present Arab social and cultural equations. As the present article demonstrates, the merit of Soueif's work does not only end with demonstrating how patriarchy functions, it further extends to exhibit with the use of relevant examples how the same patriarchy storms the social fabric of Egyptians, takes control over such fabric's governing dynamics and later starts reproducing its own sustaining logic and equations.

Gradual and Painful Rise of the Consciousness of Self as a Reality Consumed by Patriarchy

A brief consideration of the historical background of the novel can illuminate much of the novelist's intentions from writing her novel. By and large, *In the Eye of the Sun* is mainly the story of Asya al-Ulama before and after her leave to study in England. The narrative starts by the time Asya is back, commenting on what she experiences of social changes taking places during her absence. Before that, the narrative draws retrospective looks from the end of the story only to begin a chronological recounting of events that helps readers follow the flow of the narrative. It is interesting to note that the Egypt Asya returns to after an absence of eight year is different from the Egypt she used to know. President Sadet's 'Open Door Policy' has taken the country almost by surprise, and as a result of this unreadiness, such policy has some disastrous consequences on the life of peasants, whom Asya takes as the authentic Egyptians. While negotiations are carried on with the Israelis so that Egypt might win back the Sinai desert, there is no indication that Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza can ever be given back in a negotiation deal. The cost for this small gain is that now Egypt is severely cut off from the rest of the Arab World. Similarly, this main character observes that the handing of national economy to multinationals results in massive unemployment and disruptive urbanization. Cairo has become a megalopolis that is unbelievably chaotic and unbearable. Old theatres and opera houses are shamelessly switched into parking centers, ugly structures, moles, shopping centers, bridges and highways. Islamic fundamentalists are given a free hand in universities while liberals and

freethinkers are shut behind bars, and this does not go without its cost. Asya at the end looks fulfilled as she feels she is contributing to her nation with vocational teaching. Instead of surrender to despair, she is hopeful as she is socially proactive and part of the remedy that she has always wanted to take place.

Reference has already been made to the fact that the background of *In the Eye of the Sun* is Egypt's defeat in the 1967 war against Israel, also famously known as the Setback or *The nak'assa*, in Arabic. In other words, Asya's personal awareness of the world can be matched with the reader's own journey of understanding to the conditions that set the stage to June 1967 Setback. As she reads later from her journal for purposes of framing her story, she is not only considering the factuality of successive incidents and experiences as they happen without logic. Rather, both Asya and the writer seem to be motivated with the unearthing of the far reaching causes of the Setback. For the Setback, according to Soueif, has been a disaster on every scale, militarily, politically, economically, but no less importantly, socially and culturally. The narrative highlights the promise of uncovering how June 1967 was ever possible.

Indeed, the reader might in the beginning complain of incoherence before a plethora of biographical entries that come with dates, mostly Asya's, but there are also Saif's. Asya's mother, Lateefa, and friend, Chrissie, occasionally send her letters and these help readers situate Asya's domestic life with Egypt's public events. Perhaps the second explanation to such an extensive variety of journal selections lies in Soueif's attempt to illustrate the idea that Egypt's societal ills are much more complex than no amount of surgery or radical action can preclude the colossal quantity of these ills and inadequacies. Therefore, and in an attempt to understand the Setback, Soueif carefully directs Asya's attention to situations where women are systematically abused and objectified. As they appear in *In the Eye of the Sun* women often, if not always, are put to lead a marginal life; they are on the periphery of both public and domestic life and they are reduced to situations where they look incapable of deciding their own fate. Everywhere she looks she finds societal equations that can only be characterized as a phallocracy²; a set of conditions that are rife with patriarchal modes of perception and production. These modes do automatically favour men over women, not as a result of well-deserving merit that men excel at and women are inherently incapable of. On the contrary, such a partiality is found by Soueif to be a historical construct. Soueif qualifies such a situation as an essentialisation of gender that has been carefully and over an extensive period of time orchestrated to fit into a social code. This

² Keuls finds phallocracy to "literally means[...] 'power of the phallus', ... a cultural system symbolized by the image of the male reproductive organ in permanent erection, the phallus. It is marked by, but it is far more particular than, the dominance of men over women in public life... The concept denotes a successful claim by a male elite to general power, buttressed by and display of the phallus less as an organ of union or of mutual pleasure than a kind of weapon: a spear or war club, and a scepter of sovereignty." p. 2 Eva C. Keuls, *The Reign of the Phallus: Sexual Politics in Ancient Athens*. University of California Press, Berkeley (1985)

conspiratorially executed social code, as traced by the writer, is found to be based on an assortment of undeserved privileges for male members of the community at the expense of the females.

Towards such objective, the reader observes that the novel is rich with scenes that exhibit cases in which women are almost automatically condemned in the wrong. Noora, another friend to Asya, has already decided to elope from the house with Bassam, her classmate and boyfriend, by the time they both finish studies. Noora's parents display a serial incapacity to deliberate on how loving, caring and dedicated Bassam can be in respect to their daughter. His only mistake in their eyes seems to be the fact that he is a Palestinian and that is in itself, for Noora's father in particular, a capital sin. With a land confiscated in consequences of Israeli occupation, leading a life of a fugitive, how can he possibly, Noora's father appears to reason, ever afford to think of love and marriage?! Palestinians seem to have brought the disaster of land confiscations all on themselves, and as such they are held accountable for the consequences. When Asya suggests that Noora should let her mother moderate with the father: 'Will your father really never come round?' The answer that follows is disturbingly shocking and symptomatic of the patriarchal mindset: "'Never. I got my mother to sound him out slightly. Nothing direct. He said, 'She would not be my daughter. I would have nothing to do with her.'" (p. 218) Not surprisingly in this charged climate, Noora eventually elopes and thus she is officially disowned. When she tries to make phone calls at times she is sure her father is out, her mother picks up the receiver but never answers. Noora retorts to her friends sometimes later: "But she'd be frightened of him even if he weren't around... She could have contacted me if she'd wanted. If she dared." (p. 309) The father's heavy figurative presence stays inhibitive for the mother; this mother's constant fear leaves her heart shuttered but never even dares of disobeying the patriarch by answering her own daughter. It is only when Noora gives birth that her mother secretly sneaks out into short and unsuspected visits. Through the example of Noora's mother, Asya cautiously makes the reader aware with how degrading and repulsive patriarchy can be. Noora's father's sexual fantasy about the identity of his own daughter as a body (an exclusively physical entity) goes deeply to the unconscious. Paradoxically no one seems to have second thoughts about how this fantasy is generated or how it keeps reiterating since it is processed primarily as a societal given and norm³.

But in following Asya's situation, readers can observe the extent to which gender issues do shape and feed the Egyptian and Arab present reality. However obedient and sincere with her parents, Asya could not the freedom and ease with Saif, her fiancé. In order to meet him on her own, she carefully plans to miss

³ Bourdieu indicates that "The social world constructs the body as a sexually defined reality and as the depository of sexually defining principles of vision and division. This embodied social programme of perception is applied to all the things of the world and firstly to the body itself." Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*. (1998) Trans. Richard Nice. Stanford University Press, (2001), p. 11

classes, constantly feed her father lies and even invent imaginary schedules that she has to coordinate with Chrissie and other friends just in case her father should check. Her father puts what she very significantly calls 'a curfew', seven thirty, on her evening homecomings; a curfew which she has carefully to observe and comply if she really seeks his accord. Once the Italian institute rewards her with a three weeks grant for her excellence in the Italian language, Asya and

...her mother had had to plan so carefully to get her father to agree to let her come to Europe on her own. Her mother had had to point out to him privately that it would look very bad if he, the Egyptian Minister of Culture, were to turn down a scholarship offered to his daughter by his Italian counterpart. And Asya had had to go round for days looking quiet and responsible and sometimes appearing at home around sixish as though she wanted to be home and staying out late did not matter to her at all. (p. 165)

At another instant, and while she is scheduled to have a summer course in London, Asya has to feed her father a bunch of lies to the effect that there are no direct flights to London from Cairo, and that she has to do it through Beirut as the only viable option, otherwise she will miss the all-important course. It is indeed impressive to read of Asya's preparations, the amount of calculations of possibilities and the checking and rechecking of the details of the lie in order to be on her own with Saif for some time.

Perhaps it is worth to note the background of Asya's father. He is no peasant nor a new comer to the city and extremely vexed about his honour. Before becoming a Minister of Culture, Dr. Mukhtar al-Ulama is a well-known professor of psychology and the head of department of psychology at Cairo University. Both he and his wife, Lateefa, studied in England and had their PhDs there. Asya, their eldest, was raised on going to operas, theatres and cinemas. The library at home and from which Asya formed her earliest and lasting impressions of the world as a child bursts of classics and works of art. Perhaps it is not fair not to easily see Dr. al-Ulama as part of western-educated Egyptian cultural elite. How he happens to manage the details of his domestic life, like how he raises his children, nevertheless, is governed by their society's cultural codes and frame of references that are not very keen on women. Instead of being among the visionary, progressivist intellectuals and Egypt's best reformists, this well-educated, middle class father chooses to be timorous, submissive, hopeless, if not indeed defeatist, and among those parvenu academics. True, he is not among those fathers who beat or physically abuse their wives or get married on top of them (like most of uneducated Egyptians and whose stories fill the novel), but he still ascribes to the patriarchal frame of references of backward, ignorant and feudal Egyptians all the same. Indeed here lies Asya's, and by extension, Soueif's critique of the Egyptian intellectual elite. Reflected against Egyptian historical context, patriarchy seem to disable these elite members from conducting what Michel Foucault calls 'an

epistemological break'⁴, or that leap in the collective thinking of society that would put ordinary Egyptians in favourable position to bypass archaic attitudes and habits. In short, Soueif aims at making readers notice that patriarchy prevents elite members from being catalytic agents for change.

Further on in the novel, and at a more awakened state of consciousness, Asya realizes the lousy and circumlocutory forms of thinking she has been obliged to adopt by her society's cultural norms. No less importantly, she similarly notes the tortuous cost of such thinking on her energy and on the free possibilities she would have been embracing instead. Once she is in Italy, and freed from the worry of what others might think or say, Asya is surprised at the quality of life that she has, up to then, been missing and that would have easily come if the norms and expectations of her society were otherwise. For the first time, "She had enjoyed the – the feeling of anything being possible which had filled the place." (p. 167) Of course, this reactionary form of thinking, based on an anti-thesis to the crippling standards put by her society is an elusive form of freedom, as Asya later, at enlightened stages of consciousness near the end of the novel, is going to find out. But however immature it may look at that stage, this Italy experience on the whole is the one that precipitates change within Asya and endorses the necessity not to give up her identity quest.

Patriarchy Consumed and Reproduced

The purpose from Soueif's novel, so it seems, is an attempt at a genealogical understanding of the disaster of June 1967. The life situations exemplified in the earlier section of this article may help to expand on Soueif's idea that modern Egyptian society is a highly gendered society, and that social roles are rigidly fixed and defined to the extent that they set and prescribe the norm of almost any life situation. Soueif shows that any deviation from this standardized norm cannot be tolerated and escape severe repercussions. Asya notices that at almost every single social activity people do not behave genuinely. The norm is, however, shaped by a social mask and this latter is responsible for a false or mistaken sense of self. *In the Eye of the Sun* is replete with cases where no amount of explanation Asya provides for a particular problem she is facing can make her audience attentively and genuinely appreciate her exact feeling. Joseph Massad observes: "Everything about [the characters] is overdetermined in intricate and simple ways and rendered in a prose of high aesthetic quality."⁵ The reduction of life situations into fixed patterns and norms is shown by Soueif to come only to

⁴ Foucault, "This is why general grammar assumed so much importance for philosophy during the eighteenth century: it was, at one and the same time, the spontaneous form of science - a kind of logic not controlled by the mind [...] - and the first reflective decomposition of thought: one of the most primitive breaks with the immediate." Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*. (1966), Routledge (2002), p. 82

⁵ Joseph Massad, "The Politics of Desire in the Writings of Ahdaf Soueif". *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 28, N°4 (Summer, 1999), p. 75

regressive communication that limits, if not indeed endangers, people's chances in reaching out to each other. Under such circumstances, individuals are, thus, in no position to lead a productive life.

No matter how open and expressive about her communication problems with Saif seem to effectively translate as no single person from her immediate entourage (parents and friends) could shake off his or her *a priori* notions of Asya as a tame and happy or self-satisfied wife. The idea of Asya as unhappy, and by extension, not desiring a baby cannot be given a fair chance in her immediate family's notion about her mainly as a result of these *a priori* fixed and accepted wisdom. Their nearest point to the appreciation of Asya's complains is the ready-made explanation that she is spoilt, cannot be serious or is simply showing the ordinary signs of foolishness and stupidity characteristic to all women in her condition (pregnancy). For she has married the man she was dying to be with, hence she cannot be in her right mind to complain and ask for more understanding and emotional attention. Those with, perhaps, a better sense of judgment took her complains as the usual naggings of a restless wife that is soon going to be tamed. Thinking that she is too thoughtful of Asya's objections to the pregnancy, Chrissie surprisingly finds only a cliché as a reply to her despaired friend:

Well what can I say? You mustn't talk like that. What's wrong with having a baby now? This is Saif, isn't it? Saif whom you loved for more than four years? And now you'll bear him a child. I know this last bit hasn't been easy but, a baby will put everything right. Be reasonable. (p. 263)

Given their privileged position in the story, readers can appreciate Asya's frustration coming principally as a result of her intimate friend's standardized answer '...a baby will put everything right'. Readers are also privileged to know that Asya has just revealed to Chrissie what she cannot do even before her mother: "...But you know what things have been like. You know everything. We haven't even really made love properly yet. I don't feel married – it is just far too soon." (p. 262) During the trials of her pregnancy, Asya feels she has been intimidated as she finds she has lost control over her own body. The result is that the pregnancy comes against her will⁶. Not surprisingly, Saif in *In the Eye of the Sun* perpetrates all the three offenses that Keuls refers to as characterizing a phallocracy. At this stage in the novel, he has only diffident 'disregard' for Asya's sexual needs. Near the end of the story and in reaction to her affair, he, almost impulsively, rapes Asya and near the end takes a number of prostitutes.

Even when she seeks help from distant acquaintances, like her examining gynecologist, or her MA supervisor, Asya gets the same deaf ears; they are only articulated in different words, and all focus falls on the necessity to carefully watch

⁶ Here is a perfect situation of what Eva C. Keuls calls phallocracy, she elaborates: "In sexual terms, phallocracy takes such forms as rape, disregard of the sexual satisfaction of women, and access to the bodies of prostitutes who are literally enslaved or allowed no other means of support." Eva C. Keuls, *Op cit.*, p. 2

the foetus. Given his medical background, the doctor can only find the explanation of the hormonal changes that are momentarily driving Asya unhappy and wrecking havoc on her nerves. For Asya, this is a perfect instance when general medical remarks are marred with patriarchy in the name of science, a perfect situation when science is abused and mobilized in a gender war against women. The sermonizing tone the gynecologist quickly assumes carries no pejorative slant, nevertheless; it shuts him off from getting to the point Asya dreadfully seeks to clarify: 'Go home, child. Go home and give thanks to God. There are women who live out their lives praying for what you've got... Look after your husband but avoid intercourse for three months.' While despaired from having people reaching out for her help, and thinking she has got enough of society's dictations and fit-for-all prescriptions, Asya angrily satirizes the phallogocentric nuisances that feed the doctor's recommendation: 'Intercourse. Avoid it. Have it. Want it. Do you want it? Don't want it? Shit!' (p. 261) In line with the same social code, Asya's supervisor assumes a patronizing tone as he pats her shoulders and manages a funny joke, "Listen, I get pregnant every year. And each time I'm frightened... I give birth to a new play. It is nature." (p. 268) *L'esprit de l'escalier* which the supervisor fails to transmit has practically reduced Asya's case to a joke that betrays how positioned and far from any *bona fide* appreciation to what she intends to clarify.

In expanding on Asya's remarks over biased thinking and replies, Soueif cleverly shows that these fixed and preconceived formulas get passed from one generation to the next, and come through an accumulative historical process to interrupt straight reasoning in almost every single life situation. While she highlights this reproduction of the patriarchal modes of perception and thinking in the novel, Soueif also indicates how women as a dominated gender, through unconscious acts also perpetuates these patriarchal modes against itself. Following the observations of French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu about capitalistic reproduction⁷, it becomes fairly articulate to advance that while cultural modes know some seemingly thorough and profound formal changes, they nonetheless perpetuate and proliferate the thrust and essence of their egalitarian or non egalitarian dimension. In the context of *In the Eye of the Sun*, it is in following the character of Saif, Asya's husband and later divorcee, that readers get the opportunity to witness the ways in which patriarchy is able to carry on its crippling dynamics, confuse straight thinking and render it completely irrational. For an important part of Asya's awakening lies in her realization of the extent to which Saif does not carry any better notion on women than say, her own father or grandfather.

It is undeniable that Saif is an ambitious, educated, hardworking, and self-made young man. To his credits, readers find him caring and even generous with money. None of these qualities Asya complains of or even doubts. His actions,

⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, Jean Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. (1977), Trans. Richard Nice. Sage Publications (1990)

nonetheless, evoke the meaning of his name in Arabic, 'sword', suggesting the sword that equips a horse rider, as he is busy among armies conquering and enslaving women in a typical patriarchal context: a sword and a horse to each well-deserving warrior. For apart from a brief period of romance that prematurely ended with the official engagement, Asya could not lie to herself and decide that Saif has remained the same loving and caring person she first knew. After the engagement, Asya has observed that everything falls into a boring and expected wifely pattern. The news of her pregnancy does not move Saif in the least. As this is all expected, he expresses neither joy nor disapproval, nor does he react when she has a miscarriage. Similarly and as Asya reveals before Chrissie (a little earlier), their performance in bed cannot amount to love making at all.

Once when they have a quarrel, and her father brings her back to the house from which she had earlier fled, she announces that Saif does not even care about whether or not she is back, and that "...All he wants is peace and quiet and –" (p. 318) Mukhtar al-Ulama cuts his daughter short as he does not want to hear any more of what he takes as a typical wifely squabble that only time can take care of. No matter how eloquent Asya explains Saif's icy attitudes, the father acts from the same societal percepts that spell a profusion of typical patriarchal images of a spoilt, irresponsible daughter who recklessly seeks to destroy her marriage. In Mukhtar's best estimation, Asya is only making a scene; she is not only the one who is in the wrong, rather she is herself the incarnation of wrong. Therefore, she has to be taken back to her husband while that husband has always to be in the right. Such a condemnation comes at a huge cost on Asya's nerves, and part of what Soueif intends from writing this novel is to enable readers to reexperience the sick and repulsive conditions patriarchy creates. The social code, Asya finds out, is gender-constructed and biased to patriarchy. And because of this complicity with patriarchy, Asya is determined to help in the preparatory work of bringing about a more egalitarian social convention. Instead of being wifely, tame or even reactionary to Saif's indifference, Asya chooses to be tactful and prefers to proceed with a knowledge system:

When he switches off the light she turns back to the view outside. She knows that if she goes to bed nothing will happen, so she will wait until he knows that she knows it too so that he could not think that she is lying there waiting for him to touch her – so that she wouldn't, in fact, be lying there waiting for him to have a change of heart, and reach out for her – so that she wouldn't, in a moment of despair, whisper to him to hold her, 'just for a moment'. She will never do that again. (p. 409)

In leafing through pages after pages, attentive readers can underlie how Soueif's project from the writing of *In the Eye of the Sun* can be. The sheer length of the story is an indication that Soueif is writing an epistemic novel; a novel about how members of a given community get to know what they know⁸. Dissatisfied

⁸ That is Foucault's definition of his key concept, episteme. Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*. (1969), Routledge, (1972)

from the clichés, preconceived and self-suppressing notions that characterize her society, Asya, like in this passage, finds the dismantling of male supremacy through an act of conscious verbal defiance her only worthwhile vocation. In her refusal to beg Saif so that he embraces her, Asya decides to regain control, and not to offer oppression the opportunity to cheat her clean sense of self. That same decision translates Asya's decision to break the expected pattern, thus forcing Saif to think and react beyond the social code and pattern, confronting him on an unbiased ground. But Asya seems not in a hurry; her defiance takes time in gestation as she is aware that only accumulated experiences can give an independent accent and a liberating momentum to that vocation.

In being oblivious to his daughter's emotional concerns, Mukhtar al-Ulama unconsciously offers Saif a green card not to cater to Asya's legitimate emotional demands. Once in a brief hotel meeting that comes after nearly six months of separation, Saif angrily bursts out in front of Asya: "Your demands on my emotions have become intolerable." (p. 507) Not surprisingly that in this rampant patriarchal context that presumes she is working for her daughter's best interests, Lateefa fails to genuinely listen and thus she actively takes part in Asya's misery, making relevant Bourdieu's point about the dominated taking active part in their own domination. Lateefa goes even a step further than Mukhtar by vehemently defending Saif and taking his case for granted: "Saif is working terribly hard. He's got a lot on his mind. It is not easy to do what he is doing. He's making a name for himself, building a brilliant career in a very competitive world –" It cannot be denied that Saif blows off a United Nation position only to be near the homesick Asya by the time she is studying in the north of England. He, later, is asked by the Syrians to construct a computer network for their army, and not only he is busy all the time but his life is at risk as well. In a futile but patient attempt to lead Lateefa towards approximating who is Saif truly, not the one she fantasizes he is. Asya answers Lateefa:

I understand that... I'm *genuinely* not complaining about that: about the separations, about the broken appointments, all of that can be helped. What I *am* complaining about is what it's like when we're together. I feel like a stranger, I feel I'm acting, I know I'm just closing my mouth and suppressing ninety per cent of the things that come into my head. I have nothing to tell me that when he's with me it's *me* he's with; I feel like I could – *should* – slip away and leave some cardboard cutout like those Kodak ladies in my place and he wouldn't notice the difference, or if he did he'd think it was an improvement – and I can't live like that. I cannot spend my life like that. What is it? It's glancing at things and naming them and then living blindly on with the name: this is "love", fine, that's settled. Now let's get on with our business. But what is our business, in the end, what's it all *for*? What's the point of anything –' (p. 573 Emphasis in the original)

Here readers have not only an in-depth analysis of the ways in which patriarchy extends on Asya's misery. Soueif shows, through Lateefa's constant recourse

to Saif's defense despite all evidence, that patriarchy unexpectedly involves the dominated in the cause of the dominant. Because of her *a priori* notions, Lateefa cannot see that for Saif, Asya is more or less an object, very much like the Lancia he drives, the Rothmans he smokes or the Monsieur de Givenchy he puts on. He is delighted to buy her the latest evening dresses so that he can boast of her in front of colleagues and business partners. For him, Asya has no identity for herself as a free individual; he wants her to be part of his décor and background, in short, an extension to his maniac ego: "He wants her to get on with her work, to be supportive of him and his work – particularly since he's pouring money into their bank account –..." (p. 460). In consequence of this patriarchal conditioning that obscures her mind from shaking her received notions about Saif, Lateefa (not very strangely though) is still unsatisfied with Asya's reply and desperately retorts for Saif's defense arguing that he has always been loving and caring. Asya elucidates before the still indifferent Lateefa what it means to be loved by a patriarch like Saif, how irrational, debasing and unconstructive that love can be: 'I believe he believes he loves me. But it's not something he thinks about. He decided back in March '68 that he loved me and he hasn't thought about since.' (p. 573) Asya in one further attempt to explain, not to justify, the affair announces to her mother, 'I would have waited twenty years if for five minutes when we were together we were really together.' (p. 627)

Saif's patriarchal conditioning, revealed through his stiff and preconceived presumptions, infests his knowledge of human relationships, including his notion of love *reducto ad absurdum*. Soueif satirizes patriarchy through the dramatization of Saif's taken-for-granted presumptions about Asya by staging how such certainties are fallacious overestimations, logically unbinding and can only end in disaster. Stranded as a result of the long separations, Asya once explicitly threatens Saif to commit suicide or 'take a lover'. His certainty that she will not carry on these threats is a further delusion about how patriarchy operates. Asya wonders: "Why should you assume you know everything about me? Everything about how I'll react to anything? Particularly given the – given that it isn't something we've ever talked about –" (p. 424) Saif exhibits a stultifying and repressive confidence which crumbles all down by the end of the story when he starts seeking relief in brooding and self-pity. The news of Asya's affair stabs him in the core although non-biased thinking would have indicated that an affair is a possibility as Asya has been for seven years neither properly married nor happy. The illogicality of Saif's thinking premises is once more illustrated through the fact that he refuses to go back to his gold-mining job with the Syrians; thus starting on the slow journey of his demise. The nearest he is to reasoning can be found in brooding; shooting one obsessive question after another about the physicality of the affair like when and where Asya decided to betray him, not a single question on how and why. 'I *expected* my wife to be loyal. I *expected* my wife to have some sense of honour. I *expected* –' (p. 623 Italics in the original). The recurrent frequency of the word

‘expect’ specifies that Saif takes Asya’s affair as a scandal that pollutes his big name. Thus, Soueif portrays such male arrogance as unreasonable. We, readers, cannot fail to see Saif as someone irreparably delusional particularly when he maintains a conspiratorial interpretation of the incident; that Asya has been laughed at and pushed against her will. Asya refuses this belittlement and corrects him: ‘I just think it’s – patronising to assume that where there’s a – situation between a man and a woman it’s the woman who is automatically defenseless.’ (p. 666)

Conclusion

Ever since she was a teenager, readers can notice that Asya is uneasy and uncooperative with the prescriptions set forth by her society. Her active craving to be on her own, independent and mindless of how others may interpret her choices and decisions is a proof of her quest for liberation. Asya’s self expression has been a conscious attempt to reason and uncover the illogical premises of the patriarchal machine. That self-expression has also been carried out to establish a support system that can accommodate her choices, make them at least appear rational and justified for audiences. Hence, the paradox of her situation which she could not resolve in her immature state. Indeed, at her immature stages, every support system that comes her way (family, friends and husband) does not quite tolerate self-expression. It is until she questions the premises or ‘the conditions of possibility’ of her societal choices that she was able to realize that nearly every support system she has sought up to then is not only a pipe dream or false, but essentially infected with patriarchal viruses that make these support systems ineffective.

Be it motherly affections or friendly care, patriarchy has shown an unparalleled ability to infiltrate and infest intimate social relationships, rendering them corrupt and destructive instead of enhancing and constructive. In the drama of *In the Eye of the Sun*, Asya’s free consciousness turns ripe by the time she has been able to courageously confront Saif with her affair, get a formal separation, not an acrimonious split. She remains capable to genuinely care for his health problems and cherish his friendship despite the fact that he beats her on the eye and rapes her and despite his taking of a number of prostitutes a little later. She demonstrates an unusual readiness to process and filter his viewpoint without having to allow that viewpoint to confuse or poison her sense of who she is. Similarly, she leaves Gerald, her British boyfriend, without toxicity and is able to see his side of the argument and beat it down at the level of the idea (without identifying the man as his own idea). Asya’s maturity shines like a beacon when she becomes finally able to find out the true distance from everybody she knows; only then she is able to draw on her own support system, the one that really lasts and works because it is authentic and comes at the cost of extensive thinking, long experimentations and patient decision making.

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INTERTEXTUALITY IN ANGELA CARTER'S SHORT STORIES

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ABSTRACT. *“Intertextuality in Angela Carter’s Short Stories”*. The ambiguous status of the short stories from the volume *The Bloody Chamber*, by Angela Carter, where erudite and folkloric references corroborate magic realism, engenders a questioning of the literary genre. After having differentiated between children’s literature and fairy tales, we examine the pastiche and parody elements, arguing for the parodic qualities of these texts. Our demonstration in favour of comic intentionality concludes with an analysis of intertextual and intercultural referencing.

Keywords: children’s literature, fairy tale, folklore, history, intertextuality, parody, reference, religion.

REZUMAT. *„Intertextualitate în povestirile Angelei Carter”*. Statutul ambiguu al povestirilor din volumul *The Bloody Chamber*, de Angela Carter, în care referințele erudite și folclorice se coroborează cu realismul magic, pune genul lor literar sub semnul întrebării. După diferențierea între literatura pentru copii și basm, demersul de față se concentrează asupra elementelor de pastişă și parodie, argumentând calitățile parodice ale acestor texte. Demonstrația în favoarea intenționalității comice se încheie cu o analiză a referințelor intertextuale și interculturale.

Cuvinte-cheie: literatură pentru copii, basm, folclor, istorie, intertextualitate, parodie, referință, religie.

1. Introduction

The French Association dedicated to the memory of Charles Perrault publishes annually lists of the most recent versions of the classical fairy-tale. In British literature such productions are also abundant, and one of the most famous

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of them is definitely a volume of short stories written by Angela Carter in the last decades of the 20th century. Some of these short stories are apparently very similar to Charles Perrault's version of French folkloric fairy-tales, and some have nothing in common with folklore.

What we shall try to analyse in this paper is the genre of these short literary works, in an attempt to define the position of such writings both in relation to their source and in relation to the audience. That is the reason why we shall undertake the task of examining the status of these works within literature in general, after which we shall try to determine the differences and similarities between these rewritings and their potential source from the point of view of inter-textual and inter-cultural referencing.

Our approach aims at a determination of rewriting techniques as opposed to mere imitative formulae, thus reinstating the discrepancy between parody and pastiche.

2. Children's literature and fairy tales

Fairy tales and children's literature have often been considered as one and the same genre and even specialists in the field of literary theory have committed this error. When, for instance, Jack Zipes examines fairy tales, he uses the expressions "fairy tale" and "fairy tale for children" as synonyms (1983: 1). However, his analysis of the social evolution of the genre named "fairy tale" is accurate, especially since the theoretician rightfully acknowledges the existence of certain differences between fairy tales for children and fairy tales for adults.

The distinction between children's literature and fairy tales is rather difficult to determine, in the first place due to their intersection. On the one hand, children's literature comprises the sub-genre of fairy tales for children, but also various other types of literary and "para-literary" productions, ranging from nursery rhymes to comic books, from short stories with a moralising finality to adventure or historical novels. With the development of printing and that of publishing houses, the popularising system permitted an increasing variety of literary formulae to develop. And with the evolution of computer science and internet communication, new techniques flourished in children's literature, such as interactive computer games – based on famous fairy tales or having a schematic narrative structure – in which the participants are able to intervene in the plot or in the portrayal of characters.

On the other hand, fairy tales represent a comprehensive genre, probably connected to the beginnings of story telling during the first ages of mankind. Considered for centuries as a folkloric production, they have become gradually an authorial formula, since the procedure used in their transmission changed from the oral channel into the written one. Moreover, this change was accompanied by social and economic shifts: if for centuries stories have been created, adjusted and pronounced in rural communities, the dissolution and modernisation of such communities caused the disappearance of the audience, hence the disappearance of oral literature. By the end of the seventeenth century a parallel formula had already

emerged: writing literary tales. For it is in 1697 that the final edition of Charles Perrault's *Histoires ou Contes du temps passé* was published by Claude Barbin. And when the oral tale ceased to function, the remaining gap was filled by these more recent productions.

In terms of structure, literary fairy tales differ very little from folkloric fairy tales. Nevertheless, in terms of purpose and targeted audience, they are extremely dissimilar. The literary tales are the work of educated writers and, even if a number of them (such as Charles Perrault's tales) were said to have been intended for the use of children and of their governesses, they also have other social functions.

For instance, Perrault's tales had both the purpose of introducing the author at Louis IV's court (and in the king's favour) and that of amusing the society of the time. It is not to a child that these tales were read for the first time, but to a court gathering. Furthermore, the way in which the folkloric pattern was reformulated matches the moralising and sociological necessities of the time. The setting is not savage, but civilised; the characters behave according to the polite manners of the century, and the violent acts obey the "bienséance" rules, being only suggested, but not overtly described. In exchange, the folkloric tale does not respect social constraints and its setting is not a temporally and geographically localised one. The unique convention is the fiction agreement, namely that the setting is represented by a territory from *beyond*, a universe different than the real one. And the reminder of fiction is the expression "once upon a time", representing the *illo tempore*. The characters are linear, and their portrayal involves only the mention of beauty (or ugliness) in every aspect, with no insistence on social adequacy, but with emphasis on moral meaning only.

In the case of Angela Carter's *Bloody Chamber*, this agreement between the reader and the narrator is completed with several other elements, all of which do not integrate the linear pattern mentioned above.

Such an element is psychological analysis, clearly developed or simply hinted at, but present in almost all the short stories of the volume. Another one is inter-textual reference, allusions to famous literary texts pervading Angela Carter's literary work. Yet another example is represented by inter-cultural and imagological referencing, which have nothing in common with the "classical" fairy-tale structure.

The constant use of words from languages other than English is also remarkable, since the presence (not to mention the frequency) of foreign words is not a characteristic of the fairy-tale discourse, though such words may appear, sporadically, in popular stories. For instance, in the Romanian short stories collected by folklorists at the turn of the century, especially in those the protagonist of whom is a soldier (Romanian or not), the characters use either Russian or German words, depending on the temporal setting of the respective story (Cf. Bîrla, O. (1965) *Antologie de proză populară românească*. Bucureşti: Editura Academiei R.S.R.). Moreover, the popular stories from Acadia or Quebec, told in French, are nevertheless invaded by English words. But these are short stories, and not productions with a fairy-tale character.

But several important factors are yet to be taken into account. For, in addition to what he calls “mythic temporality”, the French theoretician Jean-Pierre Aubrit mentions some other features of the folkloric fairy-tale, as opposed to the literary fairy-tale: in his opinion, the folkloric tale is “objective”, its structure is fixed, its characters – emblematic, and the presence of the storyteller is felt throughout the story as a means of mediation (See 2002: 98-137). According to Aubrit, the objectivity of folkloric fairy-tales is related to the fact that they express the moral values of a whole human group, a function which they preserve to this day. With Angela Carter, it is this very objective character that is questioned.

As to the fixed structure of the folkloric tale, the idea of pattern is present in theoretical writings ever since the publication of the *Morphology of the Fairy-Tale* in 1928. And, if we are to use and apply the patterns conceived by Vladimir Propp in the first decades of the 20th century, we are compelled to bear in mind the idea clearly expressed by the specialist from the very beginning, namely, that these structures of his conception are applicable only on fantastic tales. An obstacle easy to overcome when analysing *The Bloody Chamber*, since Angela Carter’s short stories have recognisable fantastic elements; moreover, it is not in vain that critics have described her literary work in terms of “magic realism”.

However, if the main features of the folkloric fairy-tale are – more or less – to be found in *The Bloody Chamber*, these short stories may as well be characterised from a different generic perspective, that is in terms of intertextuality.

3. Intertextuality

3.1. Parody and pastiche

The first question to be raised from the point of view of the connections of *The Bloody Chamber* with other literary productions is the following: if these short stories are constructed starting from a model (namely, the folkloric fairy-tale), which is the exact relation between the source-text and the second one?

Among other sub-categories of the imitative genre, parody and pastiche are often discussed about at the same time, and frequently in parallel. Imitation represents a notion which Aristotle and Plato described as part of the human instinct to copy in order to mock at other human beings. According to Aristotle, it is this tendency to imitate – associated to the also very human desire to learn new things – that lies at the very basis of poetics (poetics meaning in this fragment literary art in general). Moreover, the philosopher states that men tend to imitate (and to appreciate the imitation of) images that they are not very fond of. Aristotle quotes the example of corpses, as well as that of hideous animals (Cf. 1994: 88-89). As for Plato, he thinks that imitation is something that serious persons would never be prone to. For him, the imitator demonstrates having only a limited knowledge of the things, persons or actions that he is copying (Cf. 1994: 146).

Within imitation, parody is characterised as a procedure by which one text is created starting from another with the precise aim of ridiculing the latter. In fact, it is not only imitation, but mostly transformation that acts in this case. Another fact is that the target of parody is easy to determine. Pastiche, in exchange, has in most cases the purpose of praising the virtues of the imitated text or of its author(s). The most important restriction is that pastiche is never meant to ridicule. Furthermore, pastiche implies servile imitation the source-text, without any change of tonality or style, without introducing new characters or reinforcing the negative features in a caricature-like manner. And, since there exists no caricature, no irony, there is no target either. But there exists a “beneficiary” replacing what is the “victim” of parody. We refer here to the object of the discourse or allusions.

When analysing *The Bloody Chamber* in terms of parody /versus/ pastiche, at first sight we may say that both elements of parody and features of pastiche may be detected in these stories. Nevertheless, we tend to think that one of the two is preponderant, namely parody. And in the following lines we shall explain why.

Many theoreticians have studied parody, an exercise of style more renowned than that of pastiche, and more frequently assumed by literary authors. Among these numerous analyses we shall mention Gérard Genette's diachronic and structural approach published in 1982, Linda Hutcheon's synchronic approach edited in 1985, and Dominique Maingueneau's suggestion (published in 1986) of a possible polyphonic approach. In the first place, within parody all types of interferences are permitted, including all intrusion of the author and all fantasy. And there is a significant number of such intrusions in Angela Carter's stories. For if the pattern of the “classic” fairy-tale is obviously used, it is only up to a certain point, a point after which this pattern is either left aside or inverted. Such is the case of the several transformed versions of Red Riding Hood: *The Erl-King*, *The Werewolf*, and *The Company of Wolves*. Far from being close imitations of the *Little Red Riding Hood* hypo-text (a term conceived by Gérard Genette, as opposed to the hyper-text, which is the parody text), these three representations deriving from one and the same pattern are extremely dissimilar.

In *The Erl-King*, if it were not for the clear reference at the hypo-text, the reader would have had difficulties so as to determine the nature of the source. Fortunately, this hint exists, but it makes the distance from the source even more relevant, distancing the hyper-text from the pastiche type of rewriting: “A young girl would go into the wood as trustingly as Red Riding Hood to her granny's house but this light admits no ambiguities and, here, she will be trapped in her own illusion because everything in the wood is exactly as it seems” (1997: 319). By this insertion, the author points at two ideas: firstly, that the heroine of the story is to be compared with Little Red Riding Hood in terms of innocence and naivety, and secondly, that this comparison is itself undermined. This is obvious in the last part of the sentence, where the idea of ambiguity and the play upon expectancies are questioned. That is to say that, since it is illusion and the fiction agreement that the typical fairy-tale relies on,

then the author hereby expresses her will to revert these very convention, therefore, the fairy-tale structure itself. If “everything in the wood is exactly as it seems”, then no appearance exists, no magic and no fantastic element are illustrated; and, thus, this tale is announced as being all but opposite to the typical one.

In *The Werewolf* there no such explicit mention of the hypo-text, but the means by which the author draws the reader’s attention to it are eloquent in themselves. The urge of the mother seems extracted from Charles Perrault’s *Petit Chaperon Rouge*: “Go and visit grandmother, who has been sick. Take her the oatcakes I’ve baked for her on the hearthstone and a little pot of butter” (358). In the French version, the words are almost the same, with the exception of the food to be offered: “Un jour sa mère, ayant cuit et fait des galettes, lui dit : ‘Va voir comme se porte ta mère-grand, car on m’a dit qu’elle était malade, porte-lui une galette et ce petit pot de beurre’” (77). – One day her mother, having baked and made some pies, told her: ‘Go and see how your grandmother is, for they have told me she was ill, give her a pie and this little pot of butter.’ [our translation] And even this slight change is not so important, since almost every variant of Red Riding Hood mentions another kind of food: a cake and wine in the Grimm Brothers’ version, a piece of meat or a slice of “boudin” in the folkloric versions collected in France by Yvonne Verdier, a piece of “cozonac” and wine in the Romanian variant and the examples could continue.

Except for this overt allusion to the classic fairy-tale, both in *The Werewolf* and in *The Company of Wolves*, the characters are suggestive of the hypo-text. And this occurs in a more extended manner than in *The Erl-King*, where there are only two characters making the reader think of *Little Red Riding Hood*, a naïve little girl and a fantastic humanoid creature resembling the wolf due to his cruelty and, on a more symbolic level, to his sexual interest in the girl. In exchange, in *The Werewolf*, the role-play is different. To begin with, the mother appears as an important character. Her role is not only that of the caring daughter sending her mother (or mother-in-law) some food when the latter is in need, but also a role of provider of advice as to the cruelty of the outer world. To this respect, we may compare the providing of advice in *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge* with the direct speech insertions in *The Werewolf*. In Perrault’s variant, “la pauvre enfant” does not guess the meanness of the world, her mother having only given her some food to fetch and no piece of advice as to the road to follow or the behaviour to adopt in case of danger. In exchange, in *The Werewolf*, it is the mother who warns the child about the dangers she risks when entering the wood and it is also the mother who gives the girl the knife to protect herself with, by the same reply suggesting at the same time the girl’s possible lack of innocence: “The good child does as her mother bids -- five miles’ trudge through the forest; do not leave the path because of the bears, the wild boar, the starving wolves. Here, take your father’s hunting knife; you know how to use it” (358). Another difference consists in the fact that here the grandmother is one and the same with the wolf, thus the number of characters being reduced.

In *The Company of Wolves* all four characters are depicted, but the changes in status are outstanding. The mother is only mentioned, in the episode preceding the girl's departure for the grandmother's house in the forest. "She has her knife and she is afraid of nothing. Her father might forbid her, if he were home, but he is away in the forest, gathering wood, and her mother cannot deny her"(366). As we can notice, even a supplementary character is alluded to: the father, never mentioned in other variants. But this brief presence is itself an allusion to the psychoanalytical image of the father figure – an image of authority, since he is the only one who might have ordered the girl not to go in the forest on a Christmas Eve. As for the wolf, he appears as a young man dressed in a hunter outfit, a portrayal which resembles astonishingly that of the Erl-King from another short story in the same volume. This wolf reveals as such only at the end of the story, in the climax part, when he fights against the grandmother and only after having killed her does he face the young girl in his Blue Beardedly attire. Yet, we may interpret these two allusions at the hunter figure as parodic allusions to the German variants of this tale, in which the hunter kills the wolf, rescuing the girl *and* the grandmother. If we analyze the superposition of the wolf and of the hunter, what we can deduce is that Angela Carter seems to have intended an ambivalent parody, comprising several types of targets in its scope, a parody directed both against the image of the fairy-tale as it is conceived by literary writers, and against its separate elements in turn.

Previously, we have dealt with the idea of authorial intrusion in the hypo-text structure. Let us focus now on another very important characteristic of a parody: the fact that it necessarily implies the existence of a target, while the pastiche has a "beneficiary" and not a target. And the "victim" of the parody stands as such due to a very precise point: the satiric aim of the genre. A satiric and not an ironic aim, since the difference between the two consists in the individualising of the target in the former case, as opposed to generalisation in the latter. Dominique Maingueneau describes this process of individualisation of target, stating that within parodic discourse either the author mocked at or the type of ridiculed discourse are recognisable (*Cf.* 88). In this collection of short stories, the fact that the target is multiple does not in the least deny its existence. Moreover, this multi-layered targeting emphasizes the author's knowledge of the various literary genres, as well as her knowledge of at least some of the numerous cultures in which variants of famous fairy-tales were written. A targeting we shall discuss in the third chapter of the present paper.

Another possibility to seize the discrepancy between parody and pastiche is the change in tone (as opposed to the source-text). If the classical fairy-tale was moralising, these short stories express a completely different type of moral meaning: one where the cunning are rewarded and the naïve are punished, where the victims are in fact torturers and where the daring scenes replace innocent gestures. In his *Palimpsestes*, Gérard Genette states that this type of ludic transformation is called parody, while pastiche is ludic imitation, without any change of tonality (*Cf.* 1982: 141).

Another difference between the two genres consists in the fact that, as Roland Barthes states it in his *S/Z*, parody is a type of rewriting within which the author of the hyper-text clearly announces the imitation (*Cf.* 1976: 52). From this point of view, pastiche resembles very much to literary fraud: the author of the pastiche never reveals the source, letting the reader guess at the possible hypo-text or hypo-author. Whenever such a revelation is made, this transforms automatically the pastiche into parody. In our example of rewriting, the source is frequently announced, both by direct and by indirect procedures. Entire phrases extracted from the source-text, physical descriptions of characters, names of heroes, settings, and direct quotations of the title of the source, they all converge to this purpose.

For all these reasons, we are of the opinion that short stories of the volume *The Bloody Chamber* are parodies in every aspect, and not pastiches.

3.2. Intertextual referencing

The most significant type of reference in the short stories in question is the reference to the source-text, an indestructible and undeniable connection between two literary productions. Indestructible since the hyper-text could not exist in the absence of the hypo-text. However, in these collected stories there exist several other kinds of inter-textual referencing: references to other literary works (other than the source-texts), references to religious literature (namely, to the Bible), and references to folkloric productions (such as nursery rhymes, riddles or proverbs).

3.2.1. Artistic and historic reference

The digressions in Angela Carter's work are proofs of her extended culture, an education comprising knowledge of both ancient and modern civilisations from all over the world. The author insinuates in her work allusions to Debussy's preludes (193), to the paintings of Puvis de Chavannes (195), to the opera *Tristan and Isolde* (196), to mythology (the image of Croesus: 196), and to many other artistic domains.

But these are completed by allusions to historic events such as the life of famous aristocratic characters or to the French Directory period. In the short story giving its title to the entire volume, the ring offered to Blue Beard's bride is an opal jewel which belonged to Catherine de Medici, a hint at the groom's cruelty: "My old nurse, who still lived with my mother and me, squinted at the ring askance: opals are bad luck, she said. But this opal had been his own mother's ring, and his grandmother's, and her mother's before that, given to an ancestor by Catherine de Medici... every bride that came to the castle wore it, time out of mind" (194). Another jewel offered to the same heroine has a yet more symbolic meaning. The ruby choker worn by the female protagonist of the short story is a symbol of blood and vengeance, but also of a long gone period in the history of France. "After the Terror, in the early days of the Directory, the aristos who'd escaped the guillotine had an ironic fad of tying a red ribbon round their necks at just the point where the

blade would have sliced it through, a red ribbon like the memory of a wound. And his grandmother, taken with the notion, had her ribbon made up in rubies; such a gesture of luxurious defiance!" (197).

Especially in descriptions of luxurious interiors, of furniture, jewellery, clothes, the allusions to history and art are very frequent. The portrayal of Blue Beard in *The Bloody Room* is a remnant of the Egyptian eyes on ancient monuments: "A huge man, an enormous man, and his eyes, dark and motionless as those eyes the ancient Egyptians painted upon their sarcophagi, fixed upon me" (199). Famous paintings are also very competently alluded to, probably in order to suggest at the same time the characters' awareness of the world and the narrator's knowledge of the history of arts. "There was a Bechstein for me in the music room and, on the wall, another wedding present – an early Flemish primitive of Saint Cecilia at her celestial organ" (202). The image of this saint is to reappear at the end, when Blue Beard calls his wife to murder her using the name Cecilia; an allusion to religion, but also to the victimisation of women: "The third, intransigent call. 'Shall I come up to heaven to fetch you down, Saint Cecilia? You wicked woman, do you wish me to compound my crimes by desecrating the marriage bed?' "(243).

In addition to general references to international art, the details on various cultures (Belgian, Italian and many others) are very specific. The author mentions the rare pornographic drawings by Félicien Rops: "I saw, in the mirror, the living image of an etching by Rops from the collection he had shown me when our engagement permitted us to be alone together..."(204). Afterwards, Blue Beard's favourite reading is revealed to be a novel by another Belgian, Camille Hysmans: "A lectern, carved like a spread eagle that held open upon it an edition of Huysmans's *Là-bas*, from some over-exquisite private press; it had been bound like a missal, in brass, with gems of coloured glass" (206). In this fragment another type of hint appears: the word *missal*, in a comparison of a rare book with a prayer book, referring to religious literature (in a parodic reference).

Sporadically, the names of writers are also mentioned from a critical point of view. For instance, when visiting Blue Beard's library, the heroine sees several uninteresting titles, titles which are both parodic and ironic references. Parodic because they criticise the image of the villain in folk literature: the cruel and violent hero is preoccupied with cheap pseudo-religious mysteries. And ironic, because they seem to represent a message from the author to her contemporaries, a message directed against superficial literature. "Eliphaz Levy; the name meant nothing to me. I squinted at a title or two: *The Initiation*, *The Key of Mysteries*, *The Secret of Pandora's Box*, and yawned" (206). The description of the gallery of paintings gathered by Blue Beard is also pervaded with parodic allusions. During the first days after the wedding, Blue Beard seeks to verify his young bride's artistic taste, speaking about Moreau. The list continues with Ensor, Gauguin, Watteau, Poussin, Fragonard. What the author calls a "catalogue of treasures" (212) is meant to add to the description of luxury, but also, at the same time, to reinforce the attempt to actualise the setting of the former fairy-tale.

Another historic moment is mentioned in order to describe the massive wooden table in the dining hall of the castle: “But imagine – [...] to sit down all alone in the baronial dining hall at the head of that massive board at which King Mark was reputed to have fed his knights...” (220). The historical allusions are very eclectic, the author neglecting all preoccupation for chronological order: this reference to the medieval King Mark is preceded by a comparison, one of the terms of which is Napoleon’s wife.

One pastiche-like reference to Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (namely to the last Book, referring to the yahoos) has an astonishingly ironic effect, in the sequence from *The Tiger’s Bride* in which the Beast considers horses much more intelligent than human beings, letting horses inhabit one floor of his castle. The image may also be interpreted as an image of Eden, where animals and human beings live together in harmony.

A humorous allusion to George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* is used in the characterisation of Wolf-Alice, from the short story with the same title. The girl brought up by a she-wolf has a unique principle according to which she makes the difference between men and animals: “Two-legs looks, four-legs sniffs” (375).

And a parodic allusion to the very genre which is questioned is made in the episode when Beauty finds a collection of fairy-tales in the Beast’s castle: “...she browsed in a book she had found in the rosewood revolving bookcase, a collection of courtly and elegant French fairy tales about white cats who were transformed princesses and fairies who were birds” (222).

3.2.2. Religious reference

Except for the symbolic image of the martyr Saint Cecilia in the Angela Carter version of *Blue Beard*, religious images appear in a number of other short stories.

In *The Courtship of Mr Lyon*, the reference to French fables – suggested by the spelling of the name *Lyon* – is added further meaning by the biblical allusion. The fright of Beauty confronted with the Beast is expressed in terms of a very Christian fear from the Doomsday incarnated by the walking animal. In *The Tiger’s Bride*, the female character describes the peasants in her native Russia as simple, very respectful and religious persons, whose gestures are punctuated by crossings. The young girl is compared by her English nurse with a Christmas rose, in remembrance of her symbolic birth on a Christmas night. The Christmas day or Christmas Eve is present throughout the short stories in the volume. It is on a Christmas Eve that the girl in *The Company of Wolves* decides to cross the forest; but this night is also the solstice night; thus, the author matches two types of symbols – a Christian and a pagan one, both connected to the idea of birth, of fertility.

And in *Wolf-Alice* the female who is half-wolf, half-human is compared – at the moment of her discovery of womanhood – with a child unwrapping a Christmas gift, the moment being therefore presented as a sacred one.

In *The Tiger's Bride*, the English nurse relates a story about a tiger shown off at fairs in the country, whose surprisingly human characteristics are described as humane by means of the word "Christian", standing for "man". A fact proving the ambiguity in simple people's minds, where all human beings have to be Christian at the same time, the lack of this quality denying humaneness: "But the tiger-man, in spite of his hairiness, could take a glass of ale in his hand like a good Christian and drink it down" (272).

Except for the constant presence of Christmas, this collection of short stories is also full of images of Paradise. In addition to the image on the Tiger's wall, we may quote the physical description of the Erl-King: "His skin is the tint and texture of sour cream, he has stiff, russet nipples ripe as berries. Like a tree that bears blossom and fruit on the same bough together, how pleasing, how lovely" (325). The passage is exactly the same as the description of the painting of Eden on the wall in Tiger's castle: "...a fresco of horses, dogs and men in a wood where fruit and blossom grew on the bough together" (274). Simultaneous presence of fruit and blossom on a tree is considered a proof of the utopian image of a perfect land, where, finally, animals and men could unite forever. But the paradisiacal representation may also be distorted, in order to reveal of rottenness, of maliciousness: "How starveling, how bereft the dead season of this spurious Eden in which all the fruit was blighted by cold!" (273).

It is the image in *The Tiger's Bride*, describing the voyage of the young girl towards the Beast to whom her father has sold her. The very Eden is desolate, consequently, no hope remains for the enslaved girl. The divinity is not almighty any more, and we may perceive this fragment as a symbol of the shift of power from the Christian deities to pagan-like Half-animal gods such as the Beast and, eventually, the girl (herself becoming a tigress).

Another image of Eden as a territory of peace and understanding between the various strains accompanies the trip of the heroine in *The Tiger's Bride* to the river on the banks of which she will be asked to unveil her nakedness. It is only the image of her naked body that the Tiger bought from her father. When she refuses to unveil, the Tiger secludes the girl. "If I could see not one single soul in that wilderness of desolation all around me, then the six of us – mounts and riders, both – could boast amongst us not one soul, either, since all the best religions in the world state categorically that not beasts nor women were equipped with the flimsy, insubstantial things when the good Lord opened the gates of Eden and let Eve and her familiars tumble out" (284). "All the best religions in the world" is the expression for those religions which preach the innocence of the nude, of the primeval state when human beings stayed together with all the other living creatures. Moreover, "Eve and her familiars" expresses the union between woman and animal; the animals have been the "familiars" of Eve and not of Adam and, even more, it is the female who is in the centre of this universe, the animals merely completing her appearance.

A similar representation of innocence and primeval purity is depicted within the portrayal of Wolf-Alice, who, in her dirty attire and inhumane gestures, is much more of a human being than those who call themselves humans. Here Eve is not alone any more, a “grunting Adam” appearing however at her side. The gestures of the animal-like first men looking for lice in each other’s manes are considered as more natural, and thus more humane than those of the modern beings who do nothing but hurt each other in the name of so-called religions. Wolf-Alice could very well fit into such a landscape of simple beauty, but not into communities of human beings: “In a world of talking beasts and flowers, she would be the bud of flesh in the kind lion's mouth...” (378-379).

The final part of the paragraph deals with Wolf-Alice’s scarred innocence. She lost her purity because of her having taken contact with people. The heroine is compared with a “bitten apple”, her wound being caused mostly by her brief relation with the nuns who have kept her in a convent for nine days and who hurt her by demanding gratefulness in exchange for their so-called help to her. The protagonist refuses to thank for what she perceives as a humiliation, even more, she instantly reverts to the primeval state. And the reaction of the Superior of the convent – who immediately sends the little girl away – represents the falsity of religious orders. For the nuns do not punish nor exclude the girl until she express no sign of gratitude towards them. When the villagers gather in the church to help the groom revenge the profanation of his bride’s corpse, their chorus singing gospels is presented as a pitiful attempt to recover the purity which only the wolves still have.

The priests, in their turn, are portrayed as ludicrous heroes, half-females, half-males. As opposed to vampires, it is these characters who are the real criminals, and not Vlad the Impaler, the vampire woman’s father, who dies leaving the legacy of his domain to his daughter.

Religious pilgrimages are mocked at in *The Tiger’s Bride* by means of the depiction of a journey which father and daughter went on from the “North of captivity” – captivity in richness for the humans, captivity in cages for the animals in the Czar’s menagerie – to the South, which in the end will prove to be the land of freedom. The father’s freedom is the infringement of family principles (since he loses his daughter at game). As for the daughter’s freedom, it represents the surpassing of the laws of human instinct and of the enmity between man and animals.

A religious object with a high symbolic value is the Bible. In *The Company of Wolves*, the Holy Book replaces human companionship in the grandmother’s old age. Nevertheless, the Book loses its power in front of the unnatural human-like wolf. And the oxymoron joining a Bible and an apron in one and the same expression is the more shocking in order to express the lack of value of religious objects. The epithet “prophylactic” used to represent the religious reminder has an ironic effect, targeted against the lack of reasoning of Christian believers. In the final urge of the defiance, all divinities are mockingly summoned as to seemingly protect the old woman from the jaws of the wolf, but in reality, this enumeration

stands as a derisive remembrance of the helplessness of human beings in front of uncanny creatures. The wolf meets no impediment when picking up the Bible and putting it on the table. The Book does not succeed in stopping neither of the deeds, nor the murder, nor the metamorphosis of the young girl into a pseudo-she-wolf. When the Bible is closed, however, the order of the world is reverted. The girl is warned of the danger by the unusual position of the Book on the table, a sign that things were not as they should have normally been.

The short story entitled *The Werewolf* is pervaded by the image of witches: witches and wizards dancing at crossroads and possibly transforming into wolves, but, most of all, witches dancing in the villagers' imagination and thus convincing them to kill. The same idea is present also in *The Company of Wolves*, where the imminent arrival of a kind of *Walpurgisnacht* is announced by the fire. In this case, the "night of the witches" represents in fact the would-be union of the girl with the wolf and the former's transfer from the "company of men" to that of wolves.

The gesture of crossing oneself, an almost superstition-like mark of reverence of the Russian peasants in *The Tiger's Bride*, changes in *The Werewolf* into a sign of fake innocence. The young girl in this short story instinctively crosses herself – not out of repentance, but out of mere wish to succeed – seconds before arousing the crowd to murder her grandmother.

The holy water is also abundantly mentioned throughout the stories. It is, to begin with, the false holy water with which the nuns punish Wolf-Alice for her lack of reaction: "The nuns poured water over her, poked her with sticks to rouse her" (376). This water is accompanied by sticks, both water and sticks being used as weapons to face an uncommon creature, perceived by the nuns as unusual, therefore, dangerous.

In association with the cross in the village church, holy water is once more mockingly mentioned in the characterisation of the corpse-eater Duke, who discovers more functional usages for both. "He will use the holy cross as a scratching post and crouch above the font to thirstily lap up holy water" (378). But the same holy water, even if used in an extremely prosaic manner, may have the virtue of delaying the cannibal's run. The drenched Duke can not flee his pursuers because of the holy water he paid no heed to. Instead, the more animal-like Alice recognises the sound of bullets for that of potential death and instinctively avoids the danger. The quantity of holy water brought in the church by the avenging former groom is also ridiculed, a parody of the religious attire the Christians surround themselves with: "He filled the church with an arsenal of bells, books and candles; a battery of silver bullets; they brought a ten gallon tub of holy water in a wagon from the city, where it had been blessed by the Archbishop himself, to drown the Duke, if the bullets bounced off him" (384-385). And quantity concerns not only the number of "bells, books and candles" the avenger surrounds himself with, but also the crowd who join him in the church for a better organisation of the chase.

3.2.3. Folkloric reference

Folklore is rather scarcely represented. Nevertheless, the aim of the referencing to folklore is a parodic one: apparently, folk tales are mentioned as nonsense. In the perspective of the heroes, the stories told by the nurses, by the “giggling maids” or by peasants seem ludicrous fantasies. But this very mocking is a way of ridiculing mockery, thus the “apparent appearance” proving to be the very truth.

The threats addressed to disobeying children are conceived by the nurses as false menaces, useful only to calm down impatient children. However, at length, their so-called falsity is revealed as being the unique false thing about them. For instance, in *The Tiger's Bride*, the nurse relates the story of a fierce tiger-man who will come and swallow spoiled little girls, creating a very ambiguous portrayal, where the father and the monster figures are intertwined. But the reaction of the child is “delighted terror”, as if to foresee the joy with which she will eventually surrender to the tiger. Even at this moment, the girl maintains an opening to the inexplicable, since she half believes and half disbelieves the story. Moreover, she has already decided that she will keep her secrets for herself, in a self-protective reaction against what the child already realises to be human lack of understanding. Both in the case of Beauty and in that of Wolf-Alice, the discovery of the wonders of the world depends on self-discovery and especially on the revelation of womanhood. These revelations occur in loneliness, triggered by the surprising appearance of the male protagonist, an appearance which in its turn brings about the discovery of corporality and of instincts.

In another seemingly contemptuous remark directed against folk tales and sayings, they are nevertheless presented as effective modalities to stimulate imagination and to increase the degree of participation to the fantastic events: “Old wives' tales, nursery fears! I knew well enough the reason for the trepidation I cosily titillated with superstitious marvels of my childhood on the day my childhood ended” (273). At the same time, in this case, the end of childhood is accompanied by a false denial of the fantastic realm of miracles; in fact, this denial is an acknowledgment of the feminine potential beginning to arise. The “trepidation” of the body matches the past trepidation of the amazement and delight provoked by superstitions.

In *The Lady of the House of Love*, a hyper-text of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the author proves her knowledge of Romanian folklore, quoting popular beliefs such as the incarnation of ghosts in animals, the riding of horses by night or the milking of cows.

But the most accurate reference to Romanian superstitious literature is represented by the mentioning of the Romanian myth of “Zburătorul”, a traditional belief providing a fantastic explanation for the transformations occurring in the life, body and mind of adolescent girls: “fainting fits, disorders of the blood, diseases of the imagination” (335).

Expressions such as “Anyone will tell you that” or “They say” are direct allusions to the popular code for life and behaviour in the rural community. It is on

such common beliefs that the parodic play of *The Werewolf* is structured. The intelligence of a supposedly naïve young girl outwits an entire community, using them for her own good. Even in matters of seduction, the meeting of the young girl in *The Company of Wolves* with the wolf-man reveals this same rural code: "What would you like? she asked disingenuously./ A kiss. / Commonplaces of a rustic seduction; she lowered her eyes and blushed" (368). But the code is ridiculed by the presence of the adverb "disingenuously" preceding an entire range of simulations of naivety.

Further on, other explanations are provided for lycanthropy, also from a folkloric perspective: simple people think that this phenomenon may very well be induced with the help of a magic ointment created and offered to humans by the Devil himself. Another popular explanation tends to connect problematic birth to "wolfishness", questioned births including the result of fantastic unions between women and wolves. Recipes, terms, ways of protecting oneself, everything is here, in paragraphs which look so credible that they might as well have been extracted from anthologies of collected folk literature – that is, if it were not for the stylistic devices revealing Angela Carter's characteristic style: "Seven years is a werewolf's natural span but if you burn his human clothes you condemn him to wolfishness for the rest of his life, so old wives hereabouts think it some protection to throw a hat or an apron at the werewolf, as if clothes made the man" (364).

The preserving of lycanthropy by burning the clothes is a solution mentioned, in the 12th century, by Marie de France, a French writer living in England at Aliénor d'Aquitaine's court, where she wrote the *Lais*. These *lais* are said to have been collected partly in Bretagne, partly in the British Isles. And the *lai* entitled *Bisclavret* (the werewolf) presents the story of a knight whose wife finds out about the fact that, every full moon, he leaves his clothes in a heap on the floor in order to run in the forest under the shape of a wolf. After having fallen in love with another man, the wife decides to burn the *Bisclavret*'s attire, thus forcing him to remain wolf until, by means of magic procedures, he succeeds in avenging his honour and punishing the guilty couple.

The seemingly naïve popular belief that any naked man running in the wood is a potential wolf must be interpreted from several points of view. The wolf may be the image of a lycanthrope, but he may as well be a representation of sexuality, perceived as dangerous for moralising reasons: "Before he can become a wolf, the lycanthrope strips stark naked. If you spy a naked man among the pines, you must run as if the Devil were after you" (365).

4. Conclusion

After having examined the theoretical aspects implied by the difference between the fairy tale and other genres, we tried to analyze schematically the imitative writing, all with the purpose of fully understanding the various dimensions of the short stories in the volume *The Bloody Chamber*.

The ludic dimension being connected both to parody and to pastiche, we have tried to establish whether these short stories are to be considered as transformations or as imitations, therefore parodies or pastiches. The numerous authorial interventions, as well as the significant number of changes (both in content and in structure), led us to the conclusion that *The Bloody Chamber* is a collection of parodies. Consequently, we proceeded to the detailed analysis of the reference mechanism linking the hyper-text (represented by these stories) to the source or hypo-text (represented by the European formula of the fairy-tale).

To conclude with, all these transformational devices converge to create a completely new formula of writing, but one which is not a fairy-tale, but its modern version, that is, a fantastic short story, apparently similar to the ancient tale, but very different from it in almost every aspect.

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“ARE YOU WRITING YOUR GREAT BOOK, I MEAN THE FINAL ONE?” IRIS MURDOCH IN 2010

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ABSTRACT. *“Are you writing your great book, I mean the final one?” Iris Murdoch in 2010.* 2010, a decade since the death of Iris Murdoch, saw the coming to light of vast production on this author’s literary and philosophical work. These last three years as a whole have witnessed vast interest in the study of Murdoch worldwide. From the work coming out in 2010, I chose to highlight seven particular publications, quite distinct among themselves. This contribution is a comparative review of those works.

Keywords: Iris Murdoch, Review, 2010 Publications, Peter J. Conradi, Mustafa Kirca, Şule Okuroğlu, Miles Leeson, Priscilla Martin, Anne Rowe, David Morgan, Avril Horner, M. F. Simone Roberts, Alison Scott-Baumann.

REZUMAT. *„Îți scrii cartea cea mare, adică ultima?” Iris Murdoch în 2010.* În 2010, la un deceniu de la moartea scriitoarei Iris Murdoch, au apărut o serie de scrieri literare și filozofice ale autoarei. În general, în ultimii trei ani, interesul pentru opera lui Murdoch a crescut în întreaga lume. Am decis să mă opresc asupra a șapte dintre scrierile publicate în 2010, scrieri destul de diferite între ele, construind acest articol ca o revizuire comparativă a acestor texte.

Cuvinte cheie: Iris Murdoch, recenzie, publicații 2010, Peter J. Conradi, Mustafa Kirca, Şule Okuroğlu, Miles Leeson, Priscilla Martin, Anne Rowe, David Morgan, Avril Horner, M. F. Simone Roberts, Alison Scott-Baumann.

Iris Murdoch’s literary and philosophical career lasted than 40 years. Altogether, she wrote twenty-six novels, six philosophy books, five plays, and a poetry book. Although appealing to many women studies’ scholars, among which I would include Deborah Johnson and Tammy Grimshaw, Iris Murdoch was always particularly keen on not being labeled a woman writer. In fact, Murdoch was very weary of labels of any kind and saw them as restrictive and unnatural. In an interview Iris Murdoch explains how her feminism is structured:

I feel very strongly about the liberation of women, and I think the main aspect of this is that women should not study their female personalities or regard themselves as superior to men in some respects because they are women or separate themselves. That’s just back to the old ghetto of being separate from men, and doubtless wonderful, but inferior! (SAGARE, 2001: 707)

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Over the years, Iris Murdoch has received scholar attention from various quadrants – literary studies, ethics, metaphysics, women studies, identity studies, Anglo-Irish studies... Though her popularity varied throughout the decades, Iris Murdoch’s considerable interest in academic research has never waned. Names like Rubin Rabinovitz, Richard Todd, Peter Wolfe, A. S. Byatt, Lindsey Tucker, Cheryl Bove, Barbara Stevens Heusel, Elizabeth Dipple, Megan Laverty and, of course, Peter J. Conradi and Anne Rowe, have established a firm ground for Murdochian scholarship over the years. But how alive is this kind of scholarship today? The sentence with which I titled this review is taken from Iris Murdoch’s own novel *A Message to the Planet*. In this new context, I use in the sense of “the definitive work”. But what makes a work on an author definitive? Is there such a thing? And must it always be the most recent one?

Iris Murdoch died in 1999 – all books published until that date are, thus, unable to be definitive by the sheer possibility of further alterations by the author herself, either through literary work, philosophical text or interview. On the other hand, critical work published in the immediate aftermath of an author’s death is particularly delicate and generally far too subjective. In the case of Iris Murdoch, the tragic circumstances surrounding her death by Alzheimer’s Disease add to this effect. John Bailey’s marital memoir trilogy is the clear-cut case. But A.N. Wilson and Peter J. Conradi seem to be influenced by her disappearance as well, though in opposite directions: Wilson’s mildly bitter desire for demythologizing and Conradi’s depiction of Murdoch as a virtuous genie. Of course, it is unfair to compare their work: Peter J. Conradi’s books (*Iris Murdoch: A Life* and *The Saint & the Artist A Study of the Fiction of Iris Murdoch*) are probably the most detailed studies ever written on Iris Murdoch and among the shrewdest, and Professor Conradi’s place as one of the leading specialists in Iris Murdoch is beyond debate, whilst Wilson’s recollection is a much more personal book. However, Conradi’s 2010 work shows a far more critical angle than his previous books. Is it because of the time gap?

2010, a decade since the death of Iris Murdoch, saw the coming to light of vast production on the author’s literary and philosophical work. These last three years, as a whole, have witnessed vast interest in the study of Murdoch worldwide – I include in this overall perception not only the work published by Murdoch scholarship worldwide, but also four international conferences on Iris Murdoch recently held in England, Turkey, Spain, and Portugal. Proceedings of these conferences have already been published or will be published. We might say the scholarship on Murdoch has reached the level where an informed tribute can be met by new avenues of criticism. In this respect, deserves the excellent work of Dr Anne Rowe as the Director of the Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies, in Kingston-upon-Thames, England, the vital core of Murdochian scholarship deserves particular praise. 2010 welcomed the second edition of the *Iris Murdoch Review*, a journal published by the Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies was founded in 2008. The

publication preceding the *Iris Murdoch Review* was the *Iris Murdoch Newsletter*. It had 18 issues between 1987-2006. They are all available online on the Centre’s webpage <http://fass.kingston.ac.uk/research/iris-murdoch/>. This latest issue includes reviews of the most recent publications on Iris Murdoch and very interesting contributions by authors, such as Frances White, Anne Sebba and Nick Turner. Particularly interesting are the Polish, Italian and Japanese-based readings of the Murdochian writing. This production is proof that the Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies is opening doors to worldwide researchers, which will assure the constant improvement of research on Iris Murdoch.

From among the publications of 2010, I have decided to comment on seven particular publications, quite distinct among themselves. In 2010, Peter J. Conradi edited and published Iris Murdoch’s letters and diaries dated 1939-1945, i.e. during the Second World War. One may, of course, discuss the ethical grounds for publishing private papers, but it is undeniable how enlightening these texts penned by Iris Murdoch herself and duly framed by Conradi, are. We are also allowed to read some other letters by her friend, partner and lover, Frank Thompson. Those letters make us subscribe to Peter J. Conradi’s idea that “Frank was a prescient friend and [Iris Murdoch] was right to mourn his murder at age 23 and to miss his wise counsel thereafter.” (Conradi, 2010, 11). Besides being an astounding resource for scholarship, *Iris Murdoch A Writer at War Letters & Diaries 1939-45* is also particularly significant for its multiple introductions by Conradi. First and foremost, Conradi still maintains his profound admiration for Iris Murdoch and her work, but he is now able to claim an incisive tone we had not fully heard from him before. His analysis of Iris Murdoch’s afterlife in popular mentality and its connection to the actual author evokes the critical manner of a A.N. Wilson or a Richard Todd, with a tender feeling:

Dame Iris, in life so august, remote and intensely private, was in death unwittingly reduced to two opposed stereotypes: in vulgar language bonking (younger Iris) or bonkers (elderly Iris). If you’re American: screwing or screwy. (...) She, whose life-work fervently championed the complexity of the inner life, has had a simplified afterlife (Conradi, 2010, 10-1).

Carl Rollyson once said “...a biography must have a voice which is greater than the sum of evidence that has produced that voice.” (Rollyson, 2005, 27) and, indeed, if in his prior works we could already hear Conradi’s voice in the back, in these texts it is louder and better than ever before.

A very different biographical work was published by Murdoch’s former student and friend, David Morgan. It is a book made out of notes on different topics which are based on loose memories and quotes from letters. Opening the book at random, you will find sections titled “Bad Manners”, “Aesthetic Experience”, “Religion”, “Marriage” and “Mrs. Bailey, who?” all put together and given a paragraph each. Morgan is in a difficult position as an author who resorts to letters he himself

confesses Murdoch had asked him to destroy (let alone not publicize) and who recognizes that "... she objected to the intrusion of self into writing..." (Morgan, 2010, 2). In her introduction to Morgan's book, Anne Rowe qualifies it as "...one of the more insightful accounts into Murdoch's life and art to have appeared since her death in 1999." (Morgan, 2010, xi). However, Rowe too reminds the reader that "...[Murdoch] wanted readers and critics to focus on moral debates, not facile equations between real and fictional characters or psychoanalytic probing of her unconscious mind." (Morgan, 2010, xxi). Still, the amount of information and the novelty of much of what is said are staggering by themselves, and Morgan's use of letters emphasizes the credibility of his memoir. We may, at times, be appalled by details being revealed which we feel we should not have been given access to – still, most of them are quite charming and touching. Morgan writes in constant dialogue with Peter J. Conradi, who first convinced him to publish the book and to whom the notes were initially intended. For instance, referring an episode concerning Indira Ghandi, Murdoch's fellow student at Badmington, Morgan mentions, "I know you dispute this because they only just overlapped and Indira was older. But she definitely said..." (Morgan, 2010, 50). The fact is that, however disappointed we may be at ourselves, our possible resistance to Morgan's memories owes probably less to an ethical sense of privacy and rather more to some shattering of myths we are still not completely ready to accept. A.N. Wilson tried it earlier and the response was quite worse, though. As Anne Rowe says, we are before "...a startlingly fresh picture of Murdoch – but one often far from flattering." (Morgan, 2010, xv). David Morgan does not claim a scientific point of writing and should not be judged by such standards – his is a personal account that tells so much about him as it does about Murdoch. Anne Rowe calls him an unreliable narrator, but wisely shows how one must always resort to some form of manipulative simplification if one is to impose a steady image upon the remembered past:

Morgan makes no attempt to camouflage the inconsistencies and contradictions that paradoxically characterize any honest account of the past. (...) this is a self-portrait as much as it is a portrait of Iris Murdoch. But such inconsistencies, omissions and intrusions are necessary; for this is the willful and damaged man whom Murdoch loved and whose account of their friendship must be heard in all its frailty if we are to understand its significance to her life and her art." (Morgan, 2010, xvi-i)

Biography, and literary biography ever so, has often been labeled a minor genre, an entertainment for book readers, and an escape from serious observation into *biographisms*, i.e. patronizing explanations that relegate all options and creations to mere existential reflexes. John Martin Ellis once wisely said

"Biographical criticism appears to be a simple means of avoiding the challenge." (Ellis, 1977, 125)

Michael Benton famously put forward a delightful metaphor of the connection among literary biography and literary theory and literary criticism. He

considers biography a Cinderella scorned by two older ugly sisters, criticism being the elder and theory the younger.

“One scorned Cinderella’s very existence as «the biographical fallacy»; the other attempted her assassination by announcing «the death of the author» (...) reports of the death were greatly exaggerated.” (Benton, 2009, 1)

Neither the demonizing of biography as a misleading instrument nor its overvaluation as the gateway to the truth can be accepted by serious scholars. We may all show, as Benton says, “...an evident, if unfocused, need to look at other lives and understand them” (Benton, 2009, 1). Notwithstanding, when referring to the lives of literary authors we must always be careful to use biography as a means to contextualize and never as a translator of meanings or desires. In that sense, Conradi’s book *The Saint & the Artist* as well as *Iris Murdoch A Literary Life*, published by Anne Rowe and Priscilla Martin in 2010 fill in an important place in Murdochian scholarship. Rowe and Martin’s book belongs to the Palgrave MacMillan collection “Literary Lives”. Initially this collection was edited by Richard Dutton. It includes books on authors such as Matthew Arnold, Wilkie Collins or Ted Hughes. Anne Rowe and Priscilla Martin create a full account of Iris Murdoch’s *literary* life focusing only on personal events which are considered pertinent to the study of her work, as evidenced by their astute chronology. The authors are well aware of the challenges and dangers of articulating biography and literary criticism and are, thus, able to obtain the most out of both. This book is, together with Peter J. Conradi’s work, a welcomed gateway to the work and life of Iris Murdoch.

The next four books I will refer to fall into the more general realm of literary criticism. In 2010 Miles Leeson published his *Iris Murdoch: Philosophical Novelist* which includes several studies linking Murdochian novels (and other works) to philosophical thinkers and history of philosophical thought. Plato, Neo-Platonism, Freud, Nietzsche, Sartre, and Heidegger are called upon to contextualize and confront Iris Murdoch’s thought. Leeson also gives readers a valuable evaluation of Murdochian scholarship which also introduces us to a scholar not afraid to express his choices and opinions. Here is, for instance, such a categorical statement:

“For Murdoch, the philosophical novel was a crystalline form that she wished to avoid as she believed it would impact negatively on narrative development. (...) I argue that the impact of a range of philosophers, and the writing of her own philosophical works, moved her narrative into this area” (Leeson, 2010, 4).

Controversial as *Iris Murdoch: Philosophical Novelist* often is in its claims, the wealth and depth of information and the richness of its commentary make it an extremely valuable instrument in understanding Iris Murdoch’s intellectual context.

Also in 2010, Mustafa Kırca and Şule Okuroğlu edited *Iris Murdoch and her Work: Critical Essays*, the proceedings of their 16th METU British Novelists Conference held in Ankara, Turkey. The book includes articles by Bran Nicol,

Frances White, Fiona Tomkinson, and Ekin Şiriner as well as an interesting introduction by the editors themselves. Bran Nicol's essay "Postmodern Murdoch" is particularly thought-provoking with its welcome assessment of Murdoch's work in its coetaneous context of writing and reading, and some postmodern concepts applied to the Anglo-Irish author. For those interested in philosophical issues and on the ethical turn now experienced by literary studies, Frances White's text is an absolute pleasure to read. Overall, this book includes eighteen essays which provide readers with a fairly accurate idea of present day Murdochian scholarship, both through the production itself and through the plethora of references made.

The role of Anne Rowe, Director of the Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies, in assuring both public and scholarly interest in Iris Murdoch and the depth of her works on Murdoch are well-known in Murdochian scholarship as a whole. The two books I am going to comment on both include her pivotal contribution. *Iris Murdoch and the Moral Imagination* was edited by M. F. Simone Roberts and Alison Scott-Baumann. As most collections, it offers readers a true debate between well-informed and opinionated scholars. Contributors include Anne Rowe, Francis White, Tony Milligan, Miles Leeson and the two editors. Here is, indeed, "...a group of authors who reflect the cosmopolitan nature of Murdoch's vision." (Roberts, 2010, 1). Focusing particularly on morality issues, even if aesthetics and history are also given attention to, this collection is very important for all those interested in an ethical reading of literature. This trend, which some consider recent, is, after all, a timeless concern for literary criticism. *Iris Murdoch and Morality*, edited by Anne Rowe and Avril Horner, is also influenced by this new shift. Contributors include Bran Nicol, Priscilla Martin, Peter J. Conradi, Simon Haines, Frances White, Pamela Osborne, Tammy Grimshaw, William Schweiker and both editors. All articles dwell on Morality and how literature and philosophy come together to interpret moral issues in the work of Iris Murdoch. Special attention is paid to Theology and the religious echoes in the Murdochian constructions of such notions as the Good and the Evil. Such issues are clearly central to the study of Iris Murdoch and are now no longer treated as a poor relative of literary theory. These two books evince this new trend.

Other 2010 publications which will be of interest for Murdoch scholarship are Julia Jordan's *Chance and the Modern British Novel: From Henry Green to Iris Murdoch*, *Reception of J. R. R. Tolkien: J. R. R. Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings, Tolkien Fandom, Paradise Lost, Iris Murdoch, Naomi Mitchison, Richard Hughes*, edited by Lambert M. Surhone, Miriam T. Timpledon and Susan F. Marseken, and, of course, Nick Turner's *Post-War British Women Novelists and the Canon*. With other works already in the printers' pipeline, there is every reason to be optimistic over the future of Iris Murdoch scholarship.

In his 2010 book, Peter J. Conradi tells us that Phillippa Foot, Iris Murdoch's friend, once said referring to the author's determination and vivacity

that Iris had probably listed in her journal something like “*Memo: to make my mark*”. The seven books that I have analyzed are representative for all Murdochian studies and make us confident enough to place a check next to that entry.

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MADAME DE MAINTENON ET LA CULTURE ROUMAINE

ILEANA MIHAILA¹

ABSTRACT. *Madame de Maintenon et la culture roumaine.* The purpose of this paper is to offer an outline of Madame de Maintenon's reception in Romanian culture. Her name, although unknown as a writer, may be found in Romanian newspapers as early as 1907. Several articles in the literary journals would be dedicated to Madame de Maintenon. They presented her personality, her life, and her rich correspondence, through which "she went down into French literary history".

Keywords: Françoise d'Aubigné, Marquise de Maintenon, 17th century French literature, Eugenia Scriban, Constantin Șăineanu, Ana Davila, Dora d'Istria, female education, literary reception

REZUMAT. *Madame de Maintenon și cultura română.* Această lucrare urmărește să ofere o perspectivă asupra receptării Doamnei de Maintenon în cultura română. Numele ei, deși necunoscut ca scriitoare, poate fi întâlnit în periodicele românești încă din 1907. Mai multe articole din reviste literare se vor ocupa de Doamna de Maintenon. Ele prezintă îi personalitatea, viața și bogata corespondență prin care ea "a intrat în istoria literaturii franceze".

Cuvinte cheie: Françoise d'Aubigné, Marquise de Maintenon, literatura franceză a secolului al XVII-lea, Eugenia Scriban, Constantin Șăineanu, Ana Davila, Dora d'Istria, educația femeilor, receptarea literară

Ignorée par les spécialistes en littérature française, négligée encore plus par les historiens de la pédagogie², sujet d'intérêt moins que mineur pour les historiens

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² Dans les ouvrages de référence roumains que j'ai consultés, Madame de Maintenon est mentionné dans un seul cas, où elle fait l'objet d'une note qui mentionne l'organisation de l'école de Saint-Cyr et de quelques propos négatif, car elle est présentée brièvement comme hostile à l'éducation des filles ((Vasile P. Nicolau, *Fénelon*, Éd. Casa Școalelor, 1936, note 43, p. 74 et pp. 72; 74; 76).

passionnés par la France, objet de médisances sinon de malentendus, Françoise d'Aubigné, marquise de Maintenon, ne fut pas pourtant un inconnue dans la culture roumaine.

La première preuve nous est donnée par la présence de ses œuvres dans les bibliothèques roumaines. Sans être spectaculaire, elle est néanmoins correcte. Dès le XIXe siècle, époque de modernisation et d'ouverture vers l'Europe, quand la langue française devient objet d'étude dans les écoles publiques des grandes villes, à commencer par l'école Saint-Sava de Bucarest, certains de ses ouvrages commencent à circuler. Parmi ceux qui entrent ainsi dans les fonds publics il convient de citer *Lettres choisies de Mesdames de Sévigné et de Maintenon*³, les deux tomes de *Lettres et entretiens sur l'éducation des filles*⁴ et *Sur l'éducation. Extraits des lettres, avis, entretiens, conversations et proverbes*⁵. Il faut ajouter la présence dans nos bibliothèques de quelques ouvrages de références qui permettaient aux lecteurs et surtout aux lectrices intéressées une information plus nuancée, parmi lesquels ceux de N. Laffont d'Aussone, *Histoire de Mme de Maintenon et de la Cour de Louis XIV*⁶, de Gonzague Truc, *La vie de Madame de Maintenon*⁷, de Marcel Langlois, *Madame de Maintenon*⁸, auxquels s'ajoutaient même le texte de la conférence de l'abbé Charles Raemy, *Madame de Maintenon et Louis XIV*⁹ ou un petit ouvrage de vulgarisation tel *Les Reines de la main gauche. Les maîtresses de Louis XIV. Madame de Maintenon*¹⁰.

Une preuve de l'intérêt supplémentaire nous sera fournie par un premier article qui lui sera entièrement dédié dans la presse roumaine du début du XXe siècle, une note de lecture, hélas non-signée, selon la coutume pour ce genre de contributions, intitulée *Madame de Maintenon*¹¹, qui était destinée à informer les lecteurs d'un grand hebdomadaire de l'époque, *Adevarul literar si artistic* [La Vérité littéraire et artistique], de la parution de la monographie de Mme Saint-René Taillandier, loin de se borner à une simple annonce, l'auteur de cet article profite de l'occasion pour donner quelques

³ Éd. M. de Lezac, Amsterdam, G. Dufour, an IX (1800).

⁴ Éd. M.T. Lavalley, IIe éd., Paris, Charpentier, 1861.

⁵ Éd. E. Faguet, Paris, H. Lecène et H. Oudin, 1887.

⁶ T. I-II, Paris, Imprimerie de Magimel, 1814.

⁷ Paris, Gallimard, 1929.

⁸ Paris, Plon, 1932

⁹ Conférence donnée à la Salle de la Grenette, à Fribourg, le 20 février 1880. Fribourg, J. Labastron ; Neuchâtel, J. Sandoz, 1880 (35 p.)

¹⁰ Paris., « Les Œuvres Galantes », s. a., 192 p. (Extraits des chroniques de l'Œil de Bœuf).

¹¹ *Adevarul literar și artistic*, an II (1921), no. 13, 20 fév., p. 4. Pour toutes les informations concernant la presse roumaine je suis redevable à l'énorme travail des trois équipes de chercheurs qui ont réalisé les 19 tomes de la *Bibliographie de la presse roumaine* à partir de 1790 et jusqu'à 1944 et dont je suis fière d'avoir fait partie. La première série, *Bibliografia analitică a periodicelor românești (1790-1859)*, a été réalisée par Ioan Lupu, Nestor Camariano et Ovidiu Papadima (6 tomes, Bucarest, Ed. Academiei, 1966-1972) ; la deuxième et troisième série réduisent le champ d'investigations aux relations de la littérature roumaine avec les littératures étrangères dans la presse périodique (*Bibliografia relațiilor literaturii române cu literaturile străine în periodice - 1866-1918*, coordonneurs : Ioan Lupu et Cornelia Ștefănescu, 3 tomes, Bucarest, Ed. Academiei, 1980-1985 et *1919-1944*, auteurs : Ana-Maria Brezuleanu, Ileana Mihăilă, Viorica Nișcov, Michaela Șchiopu, Cornelia Ștefănescu, 10 tomes, Bucarest, Ed. Saeculum, 1997-2009). L'ouvrage a été couronné par l'Académie Roumaine.

détails sur la vie et sur l'activité de Mme de Maintenon, présentée brièvement mais avec chaleur, quoique non exempts d'une erreur flagrante :

« Qu'elle est belle, l'histoire de cette femme qui, comme Mademoiselle Françoise d'Aubigné, trouble l'écrivain moraliste Méré et même son confesseur l'abbé Gobelin. Sa force d'attraction bouleverse le docteur Fagon, premier médecin de la cour de Louis XIV, la rapproche de Bossuet et la fait gagner l'amitié de Ninon de Lenclos. Finalement, elle se marie avec le poète Scarron, écrivain satyrique et ironiste célèbre, puis en divorçant [sic !] elle se remarie avec le Roi Soleil lui-même, le protecteur de l'art et de la science de son époque. Elle crée la fameuse école de Saint-Cyr, où représente pour la première fois Racine les deux chefs-d'œuvre *Esther* et *Athalie*, prendre part active à la politique de la France et subit les plus terribles et injustes épigrammes de la part de ses contemporains.

Madame Taillandier lui consacre tout un livre, par lequel el veut revenir sur le jugement de tant de biographes communs habitués à la peindre comme un être sans cœur, drapée dans une rigidité parfaite [...]. Il faut tout d'abord démolir la légende de « légèreté féminine » dont ses contemporains l'accusent. Ninon de Lenclos – qui, soit-il dit en passant, était merveilleusement instruite en ce genre de choses –, la caractérisait comme étant complètement dépourvue du sens de l'amour. En lisant ses propres lettres, nous pourrions voir combien ont été injustes Saint-Simon et [La] Beaumelle. Une femme qui a eu tant d'influence ne pouvait pas ne pas avoir tant d'ennemis aussi. Il ne faut pas oublier que, pour le bien de la France, c'est elle qui a combattu pour la révocation de l'Édit de Nantes, afin d'unifier le royaume. Madame Taillandier est une femme et, en écrivant sur une femme, elle a le don de juger les choses autrement que les hommes, qui condamnent si légèrement les femmes. »

Soit dit en passant, la dernière affirmation nous laisse présumer que l'auteur de cet article était une journaliste, chose fort probable puisque la revue comptait parmi ses collaborateurs avec plusieurs plumes féminines, certaines non seulement francophones (elles l'étaient toutes), mais même des professeurs de français, dans le secondaire surtout.

Quatre années plus tard seulement, en 1925, la même revue dédie à Mme de Maintenon une place exceptionnelle : un des spécialistes les plus sérieux de l'époque, Constantin Șăineanu¹², professeur de français, auteur de manuels de langue et littérature française et surtout d'un remarquable dictionnaire franco-roumain, s'attarde sur sa personnalité, mais aussi sur son activité et même sur ses écrits, dans une longue étude, publiée en deux numéros, à chaque fois sur une grande page tout entière. La première partie de l'article, *Le Roman de la vie de Madame de Maintenon*¹³ est même accompagnée par un grand portrait de madame de Maintenon. Quant à la seconde¹⁴, elle est illustrée, pour mieux donner au lecteur

¹² Frère de Lazăr Șăineanu (Eliezer Schein, 1859-1934), un des plus importants philologues roumains. Il allait s'établir en France en 1901 et conquérir une certaine notoriété sous le nom de Lazare Sainéan.

¹³ « Romanul vieții Doamnei de Maintenon » *Adevărul literar și artistic*, an VI, 1925, no. 223, 15 mars, p.6.

¹⁴ « D-na de Maintenon ca educatoare și soție de rege », *Adevărul literar și artistic*, an VI, 1925, no 225, 29 mars, p. 5.

une idée de son style et de ses idées, par la traduction d'une longue relation qu'elle avait faite pour Madame de Glapion d'une de ses journées à Versailles¹⁵.

Par rapport à l'article publié en 1921, cette étude nous apparaît certes plus riche en informations et beaucoup mieux écrite. Compte tenu du niveau élevé des lecteurs du journal en question (dont la spécialité était l'actualité littéraire et artistique, roumaine et étrangère), qui étaient tous bons connaisseurs de tout ce qui touchait à la France (objet essentiel des études secondaires en Roumanie à cette époque), on peut remarquer que l'objectif de l'auteur était moins de donner des informations nouvelles, mais de les organiser mieux en les présentant avec vivacité et surtout d'introduire une nouvelle perspective et des aspects moins connus et qui correspondaient avec une nouvelle vision qui lui semblait en train de s'imposer :

« La vie de Mme de Maintenon est une de plus merveilleuse qui ait jamais existé. Ce n'est que dans les contes de fées – où les pâtres et les empereurs vivent sur pied d'égalité et peuvent facilement passer d'un état à l'autre – qu'un tel miracle sois possible. Mais en France, au siècle le plus glorieux des lettres et de la politique française, qu'une telle chose arrive, on ne peut pas le croire, la raison ne saurait l'admettre.

Et pourtant le miracle s'est réellement produit. Une fille pauvre née en prison, élevée par pitié par une parente, se marie à 16 ans par nécessité avec un poète paralytique de 42 ans, vit avec lui 8 ans, tout en restant vierge, subit après sa mort toutes sortes de misères, puis elle devient l'institutrice et la gouvernante des enfants illégitimes du roi et plus tard, à 48 ans, l'épouse légitime même de Louis XIV, surnommé le Roi Soleil.

Mais du nom de cette femme extraordinaire est lié un autre fait encore, d'une importance toute particulière, qui la rehausse à nos yeux, et qui perpétuera son nom dans l'avenir, à savoir l'Institut pour les jeunes filles nobles orphelines de Saint-Cyr, créé et dirigé par elle-même, destiné à préparer pour leur mission future 250 enfants. »

D'autre part, les commentaires concernant sa création littéraire nous montrent que l'intérêt de l'auteur se déplace graduellement du domaine de l'anecdote historique :

« Enfin, il nous reste d'elles une riche *Correspondance*, un nombre considérable de lettres (huit tomes)¹⁶, la plupart concernant l'activité de cet institut et très

¹⁵ Seule traduction de l'héritage de Madame de Maintenon que nous avons pu trouver jusqu'à présent en roumain !

¹⁶ Cette indication semble renvoyer à l'édition de La Beaumelle (*Lettres de M^{me} de Maintenon à diverses personnes*, Amsterdam, chez Pierre Erialed, 1757, 9 vol.) et non pas à celles, plus récentes, de Théophile Lavallée (4 tomes, 1865-1866), et d'E. Faguet (1 tome, 1887) pourtant présentes dans nos bibliothèques, ou d'A. Geffroy (2 tomes, 1887), de P. Jaquinet (1 tome, 1888), ou à celle de Gonzague Truc (*Lettres à d'Aubigné et à madame des Ursins*, Paris, Bossard, 1921), quoique la présence de l'ouvrage sur madame de Maintenon de ce dernier dans nos fond publics laisse présumer que son activité ne fut point inconnue par notre auteur. En tout cas, l'intérêt qu'il accorde à la correspondance de Madame de Maintenon montre qu'il était bien informé sur cette nouvelle perspective critique.

intéressantes du point de vue éducatif, d'autres sont d'ordre familial, et la plupart adressées à son confesseur. Ces lettres, par le grand intérêt qu'elles présentent, et par leur valeur littéraire, placent Mme de Maintenon à côté de Mme de Sévigné, quoique leur manière d'écrire soit si différente : si le cœur et l'esprit transpirent des lettres de celle-ci, le froid jugement et la l'attitude sérieuse excessive caractérisent celle de l'autre. »

Mais l'intérêt pour la correspondance de Mme de Maintenon avait déjà fait son apparition dans la presse roumaine une vingtaine d'années auparavant. Il est intéressant de le constater dans un article portant pour titre *La femme en littérature*¹⁷, appartenant à une journaliste de l'époque, Eugenia Scriban¹⁸, qui date de 1907. L'article commence par discuter le statut social et juridique de la femme, « considérée de la même valeur qu'un animal par le Code de Hammourabi » et milite pour son émancipation à l'époque moderne. Comme argument, Eugenia Scriban passe en revue les grands noms des femmes-écrivains de tous les pays et de toutes les époques, à commencer par l'antique Sapho, et arrive vers le milieu de sa démonstration à celle qui nous intéresse :

souvent – selon sa propre confession – on ressent des moments de lassitude. Parmi les aut« De Mme de Maintenon, maîtresse de Louis XIV, il nous reste aussi un grand nombre de lettres, qui se distinguent par l'élégance du style et par un jugement sévère. Mais elles ne sont pas un miroir fidèle des événements contemporains, à cause de sa position et parce que bien res lettres de madame de Maintenon nous notons *Les Entretiens* et des *Conseils* pour les filles de Saint-Cyr. Tous sont caractérisés par les qualités que j'ai mentionnées auparavant, ce qui nous semble la preuve d'un caractère solide et noble. »

Mais dans la suite de l'étude de C. Șăineanu nous remarquons de plus en plus s'infiltrer une attitude bien plus critique envers la fameuse sécheresse du cœur de Françoise d'Aubigné, que lui avait attribué déjà Ninon de Lenclos et qui sert de raison à grand nombre de ses observations. Cette différence de perspective par rapport à la présentation d'Eugenia Scriban semble confirmer notre hypothèse que le texte non signé de 1921 était l'œuvre d'une femme. Car voilà comment il présente la suite d l'histoire de Madame de Maintenon :

« À la suite des conseils de cette femme ou non, en tout cas rendu bigot et approuvé par elle, le roi révoque l'Édit de Nantes, par lequel Henri IV avait mis fin aux guerres religieuses en France, en accordant aux huguenots certains droits [...] Malheureusement, l'influence de Mme de Maintenon sur le roi a été néfaste. Les

¹⁷ Eugenia Scriban, « Femeia în literatură », *Revista idealistă*, 1907, t. 1, no. 3, pp. 243-263, t. 2, no. 4, p. 57-85.

¹⁸ Probablement épouse du professeur August Scriban, lui-même collaborateur à la même revue (parue à Bucarest entre 1903 et 1916), et appartenant à une prestigieuse famille de lettrés roumains du 19^e et de la première moitié du 20^e siècle. Il a été professeur de lycée, d'abord dans la petite ville de Caracal, muté ensuite à Bucarest et puis, en 1906, à Iasi. L'étude d'Eugenia Scriban prouve une information riche concernant la littérature féminine au long des siècles et une attitude nette et vigoureuse en faveur de l'émancipation de la femme à son époque.

guerres sont perdues une après l'autre, par les généraux et les ministres qui étaient ses créatures. Des temps durs s'abattent sur le pays. Presque toute la famille royale périt empoisonnée sans qu'on puisse savoir par quelle main criminelle. Enfin, consumé par les soucis, le roi meurt à 77 ans. Sur son lit de mort, il lui demande pardon de ne pas l'avoir rendue heureuse ! Pas une larme sur ses joues. Son seul souci est que le moribond reçoive l'extrême-onction. Après la mort du roi, elle se retire à Saint-Cyr, l'institut pour les orphelines nobles, créé et dirigé par elle-même. Là elle vit encore trois ans et meurt à l'âge de 83 ans.

C'est difficile de caractériser cette femme qui a joué un rôle si décisif dans le destin de la France, qu'elle a dirigé de l'ombre, du noir. Son influence, parfois bienfaisante, a été souvent fatale à la politique de son pays. Cette femme extraordinaire, qui est née protestante et qui est devenue par la suite exterminatrice des protestants, a été mariée sans être femme, est restée dans un couvent sans être religieuse, a élevé des enfants sans être mère, a été épouse légitime de roi sans être reine - elle restera sans doute un mystère pour toujours. Je suis une énigme pour le monde, dira-t-elle de soi-même.¹⁹ »

Heureusement, la suite promise à la fin de l'article, parue deux semaines plus tard et intitulée *Madame de Maintenon comme éducatrice et épouse de roi*, est plus intéressante. C. Șăineanu s'intéresse ici à son activité concrète à Saint-Cyr, à sa création tout d'abord, à l'implication du roi lui-même dans ce projet, par amour pour elle, et surtout au programme d'études et de récréation, en mettant en évidence l'effort personnel de Mme de Maintenon :

« Elle quittait le palais de Versailles à six heures du matin, pour assister au lever des élèves, entraînait dans les dortoirs, elle peignait et habillait les petites, donnait des ordres partout. Elle s'occupait d'une classe deux-trois mois, donnait des instructions générales et s'occupait de chacune des enfants en partie. Elle se sentait dans son élément au milieu des enfants, elle se rendait agréable, gentille. Elle leur disait toujours que leur mission n'était pas de devenir des savantes, mais des bonnes et modestes maîtresses du logis. Et les filles l'écoutaient avec plaisir. Souvent, elle prenait le repas avec elles et elles s'amusaient ensemble.

En tant qu'institutrice, Mme de Maintenon était sans rivale. C'était comme si elle n'aurait jamais eu d'autre mission que celle-ci. Nous trouvons tout un système pédagogique dans sa correspondance volumineuse. »

Qu'il nous soit permis de constater que cette partie de l'article peut être interprétée comme une fine allusion aux différences constatées par la société roumaine de l'époque dans un projet similaire de la Maison Royale roumaine, de trop fraîche date et encore en fonction. Effectivement, Bucarest comptait avec un établissement relativement similaire, nommé l'Asile « Elena Doamna », destiné à la prise en charge de jeunes filles orphelines. Créé en 1862, par l'initiative d'une noble roumaine, Ana Davila, née dans une famille noble, Golescu²⁰, il avait été

¹⁹ Cette belle phrase, est-elle de C. Șăineanu ou il l'a traduit du français ? Je n'ai pas identifié une source certaine, mais mon travail de traducteur a été beaucoup trop facile !

²⁰ Épouse du docteur Carol Davila, co-fondateur de l'École de Médecine et Pharmacie à Bucarest en 1857.

visité quelques mois plus tard par l'épouse du Prince régnant des Principautés-Unies, autrement dit de la Roumanie, Alexandru Ioan Cuza²¹, Elena, née dans la famille princière des Rosetti. Celle-ci fit immédiatement un don à l'asile de 1,000 pièces d'or et obtint de son époux les fonds nécessaires pour la construction d'un bâtiment convenable et le transfert de l'établissement sous l'administration financière de l'État. Après le changement de dynastie et l'avènement de la famille de Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen au trône de la Roumanie, la reine Elisabeth allait s'intéresser elle aussi à l'asile *Elena Doamna* qu'elle allait compléter par la construction d'une belle chapelle pour assurer le service divin aux élèves. La Chapelle Sainte Elisabeth fut construite entre 1870 et 1874 et peinte par un des meilleurs peintres roumains de l'époque, G. Tattarescu, une bonne partie des frais étant supportés par la reine elle-même (12,000 pièces d'or), le reste par souscription publique. Afin de pourvoir aux dépenses de cet établissement, le roi allait faire une donation importante à l'asile de sa casette personnelle, un terrain de 10 ha dans la proximité. L'asile allait fonctionner sous ce nom et avec cette destination jusqu'en 1948. Pourtant, si l'intérêt et la générosité des reines roumaines y a largement contribué, elles ne se sont jamais impliquées personnellement dans le bon fonctionnement de l'établissement. Mais des écrivaines et traductrices roumaines de l'époque, comme Maria Flechtenmacher²², y ont travaillé comme professeurs. Il est à supposer qu'en présentant tellement en détail l'activité pédagogique de Madame de Maintenon, Șăineanu essayait en même temps de la donner pour modèle à cet égard.

Il faut néanmoins constater que la suite est plus critique :

« Malheureusement, plus elle avançait en âge et plus sa pédagogie devenait plus sévère. Peu à peu elle avait limité l'instruction des filles et essayait de leur briser la volonté sous cette avalanche d'ordres, de conseils, de règlements sévères, la personnalité des élèves étaient presque étouffée. Et encore plus, elle leur infiltrait le dégoût pour la vie, pour la société et pour le mariage. Donc elle risquait de tuer en elles aussi bien le sentiment maternel que le sentiment religieux. Trop de morale et de vertu, trop peu d'amour et de jugement. Il lui a manqué cette fleur du cœur qu'est l'amour. »

Dans cette perspective, la description d'une journée à Versailles que Mme de Maintenon avait fait à Madame de Glapion, reproduite *in extenso* en traduction roumaine, n'est qu'une preuve de plus pour ce qu'il venait d'avancer et prépare le lecteur pour une triste et injuste conclusion :

²¹ C'est sous son règne que l'union de la Moldavie et de la Valachie s'est effectuée, le 24 janvier 1859. Il allait régner jusqu'au 11 février 1866. Le nom en roumain pour « prince régnant » étant *Domn* (du lat. *dominus*), le titre de son épouse était tout naturellement *Doamna* (du lat. *domina*), qu'il ne faut pas confondre avec les noms communs *domn* et *doamna*, qui signifient *monsieur* et *madame*.

²² Née Maria Mavrodin (1838-1888, Bucarest), elle compose des dialogues et des saynètes pour les ses élèves de l'asile Elena Doamna ; elle a créé et dirigé la revue *Femeia Română* [La Femme Roumaine], pour laquelle elle a traduit, entre autres, *Les Fleurs, ou les artistes*, de Mme de Genlis.

« Il lui a été donné à cette femme sans cœur de payer après sa mort pour son manque d'amour. La postérité a été injuste envers elle. Et le destin trop dur. Pendant la grande Révolution, la chapelle de Saint-Cyr, où elle était enterrée, fut démolie, et ses ossements retirés, brisés et jetés dans une fosse de cimetière. Plus tard, ils furent sortis de là et enterrés sous un tombeau dans le jardin de l'École, et puis à nouveau déposés, par l'ordre d'un commandant, dans la chapelle restaurée, où ils reposent encore aujourd'hui. »

Pour conclure, je ferai appel à la plus ancienne référence sur Madame de Maintenon sous une plume roumaine. Il s'agit de notre compatriote d'expression française Dora d'Istria, auteure de plusieurs livres concernant notamment la question féminine (*Des Femmes en Orient*, 1859-1860 ; *Des Femmes par une Femme*, 1869). Dans ce dernier ouvrage, au 1er chapitre, sous-chapitre III, « Les Françaises sous le règne des Bourbons », elle mentionne Madame de Maintenon²³, à propos de la protection qu'elle avait assurée à l'abbé de Fénelon (notamment dans la question assez épineuse et complexe de l'éducation des filles au 17-e siècle). Quelques pages plus loin seulement, et dans le même contexte²⁴, Dora d'Istria s'arrête à nouveau sur Madame de Maintenon, pour informer ses lecteurs que, « quoique M. le duc de Noailles, collègue de M. Cousin²⁵ à l'Académie française, et M. Théophile Lavallée se montrent fort indulgents pour madame de Maintenon, on lira leurs ouvrages avec profit ». C'est ce qui lui permet de conclure :

« En général, l'histoire des femmes françaises du XVIIe siècle commence à être étudiée d'une manière digne du progrès des sciences historiques. [...] C'est assurément un symptôme fort digne d'être remarqué que le zèle avec lequel les hommes [...] s'absorbent dans des études qui auraient excité infailliblement la colère du respectable Chrysale, - on dirait aujourd'hui ' l'honorable ' - et ce seul fait prouve le chemin que l'opinion a fait en France depuis Molière ».

Ces mots, publiés par Dora d'Istria il y a 150 ans, se sont heureusement avérés non seulement corrects, mais aussi prophétiques. Et, puisqu'elle les avait écrits en pensant aux Françaises du 17^e siècle en général, à l'éducation des femmes en spécial et à Madame de Maintenon en particulier, je me suis permis de les citer, puisque tout ce que nous venons de dire ici et à ce même sujet semble la justifier pleinement.

²³ Dora d'Istria, *Des Femmes par une femme*, Paris, Librairie Internationale, 1869, p. 28.

²⁴ P. 30-31.

²⁵ Qu'elle distingue pour ses travaux sur « mesdames de Longueville (1853), de Sablé (1854), de Chevreuse et de Hautefort (1856) et sur Mlle de Scudéry (*La société française au XVIIe siècle d'après le Grand Cyrus*, 1858), p. 30.

HISTORY AND MEMORY IN THE OLD SOUTH: CONSTRUCTIONS OF FEMALE IDENTITY IN KATHERINE ANNE PORTER'S *THE OLD ORDER*

IULIA-ANDREEA MILICA¹

ABSTRACT. *“History and Memory in the Old South: Constructions of Female Identity in Katherine Anne Porter’s The Old Order”*. History and memory are, for many Southern writers, important elements in the process of shaping the Southern mind. In this context, growing up in the South is a complicated phenomenon, the young Southerner being split between pressures of the family past and traditions and his or her personal ideals. Female identity formation in the South is an even more intricate matter in a world dominated by the authority of the white male, in which white women and black slaves share, in different degrees, a submissive position and are forced to cope with this situation. The purpose of the paper is to examine the construction of female identity in the old South, as it was depicted by Katherine Anne Porter in the collection of short stories *The Old Order*.

Keywords: Southern culture, female identity, memory, history, otherness, race.

REZUMAT. *“Istorie și memorie în vechiul Sud. Construcții identitare feminine în The Old Order de Katherine Anne Porter”*. Istoria și memoria sunt, în viziunea scriitorilor americani din Sud, elemente dominante în procesul de formare a identității sudice. Tensiunea dintre obligațiile ce provin din tradițiile și istoria familiei și propriile idealuri marchează procesul dificil de maturizare a tânărului sudist. În acest context, formarea identității feminine este complicată și mai mult de structura patriarhală a Sudului american, în care femeile și sclavii se află, în diverse grade, bineînțeles, într-o poziție de supunere față de stăpânul alb, identitatea lor fiind marcată de această subordonare. Scopul lucrării este de a examina formarea identității feminine în Sudul de dinaintea Războiului Civil așa cum este prezentat de Katherine Anne Porter în ciclul de nuvele *The Old Order*.

Cuvinte cheie: Cultura Sudului American, identitate feminină, memorie, istorie, alteritate, rasă.

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Many authors, especially in the twentieth century, with the rise of the Southern Renaissance, have remarked that the South has a different relationship to history than the North, coming from the experience of defeat and the struggle to maintain the old ways of life after the loss of the Civil War. The Southerners needed almost a century to heal these wounds and be capable to have a realistic perspective upon their history and its meaning. For a long period of time, extending from the decades before the Civil War to the end of the nineteenth century with traces even in the twentieth century, many Southern writers fabricated a romanticized image of the old South, with stereotypical characters living an idyllic life controlled by fixed codes of manner which made the South a land of aristocrats, living on vast and rich plantations, and surrounded by loyal and affectionate slaves. The writers of the twentieth century, especially the generation starting with Ellen Glasgow and continuing with William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, Katherine Anne Porter, Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate and others find it difficult to accept this nostalgic return to a past that they suspected to be just a fake image to soothe a guilty conscience. They do not deny that history is important in the process of re-evaluation of the Southern identity, but it was not that history presented in the plantation novels. They become aware that “the history of the South was generally discreditable, if not faintly ridiculous”² and that they are seen as belonging to a group regarded as backward, lacking value and talent and unable to produce a valid cultural identity.

Aware that the identity of the Southerner is marked by personal history combined with that of the region and that they need to face the guilt of belonging to a world of slavery, violence and prejudice before accepting it, the Southern Agrarians tried to promote a different image of the South, one that would accommodate this burden of the Southern history by moving in two directions: one in which history is seen as a betraying force out of which the Southerner cannot escape, as a constant reminder of loss and defeat, of violence and racial conflict, a world to be hated, as, for instance, Quentin Compson in Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* believes. On the other hand, since the Southerner cannot escape from this historical form of conditioning, history also becomes the source of strength and identification. Unable to shake this burden off, the Southerner integrates this acceptance of history as an inherent part of his identity, and as the basis of differentiation from the dominant American mind. And again, Quentin Compson, in trying to explain to his college fellow Shreve how the South is, reaches the conclusion that one has to be a Southerner to understand the South, because only a Southerner can find order and meaning in his region’s historical experience and because, of all Americans, only the Southerner has a more acute feeling of the importance of history in the process of identity formation.

² Corner Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008, p.28.

The importance of the Southern Renaissance is crucial in redefining Southern identity and, aware of the importance of their task, the representatives of this movement tried to offer a unified and coherent image of the Southern mind. However, as Michael Kreyling notices, they were conscious that, in their re-evaluation of the South, they might leave out important aspects:

“The principal organizers of *I’ll Take My Stand* knew full well that there were other ‘Souths’ than the one they touted; they deliberately presented a fabricated South as the one and real thing. On their left was the near-legendary scrutiny of the Sahara of the Bozarts triggered by the Scopes trial in the mid-1920s. On the right was a movement to institutionalize nostalgia for the Old South, expressed in the inauguration of annual spring pilgrimages in several southern towns.”³

Thus, the Southern identity they envisaged is mainly that of the white male Southerner⁴, and though writers like Ellen Glasgow or Katherine Anne Porter were accepted as valuable promoters of the Southern culture, there are many issues that most writings do not fully take into consideration: class issues (the South of the poor whites or of the yeoman farmers), gender issues (female identity in the South more than the stereotypical images of the “Southern belle,” “the honorable matron” or the “pitiful spinster”) and racial issues (African-American identity as shaped through slavery, Emancipation and segregation).

Katherine Anne Porter, therefore, comes to complete this landscape, especially through the cycle known as “The Miranda Stories” which includes the collection of short stories *The Old Order*, published in 1944, and the two short novels *Old Mortality* (1937) and *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* (1939). The stories are semi-autobiographical, Miranda mirroring Katherine Anne Porter’s experiences of growing up in the shadow of an authoritative grandmother, representative of the old southern way of life. The long and often painful process of maturity for Miranda parallels the formation of the Southern identity split between the burdensome influence of the past and the freeing lures of the modern world. The short story collection *The Old Order* depicts, as the title suggests, the influence of the old order, of the family past in the process of shaping the identity of the young generation, especially of Miranda, informing her about the roles she, as a future southern lady, needs to play, about the past of her world, including the darker aspects of slavery and, after the Civil War, the relationships with the freed slaves in a world in which white authority is differently understood, up to aspects connected to life and death, to birth and entombment, the secrets of the womb and the tomb.

The most important figure in the collection is that of the grandmother, the representative of the “old order” and the one obsessing about order and discipline in her household and family, the firm defender of the past and the main educator in

³ Michael Kreyling, *Inventing Southern Literature*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998, p. xii.

⁴ Michael Kreyling actually mentions, in this context, the overwhelming influence the writings of William Faulkner had in shaping what is known as “the Southern identity.”

Miranda and her siblings' life, following their mother's death after giving birth to Miranda. The grandmother's presence in the stories is doubled, almost all the time, by that of the old black servant, Aunt Nannie, the faithful life-long companion, the one constantly present, in good and bad times, out of an acceptance of one's place into that order transformed, only in time and through shared suffering, in affection. Aunt Nannie is the constant reminder of the fact that the past is not a world of order and safety, but, one of violence, injustice and suffering. These two feminine figures and their effect on the young generation form the frame of reference for Miranda as she grows up, offering examples of traditional female experiences and also, sometimes, of untraditional attitudes, creating the background of what it means to grow up in a South slowly moving into the twentieth century, but reluctant to give up pre-Civil War attitudes and behaviors.

Katherine Anne Porter is mainly interested, in her fiction, in the formation of female identity between the pressures of the past and the dreams of the future which forms: "the theme that was to dominate her writing: a woman's search for independence and the conflict between this and, on the one hand, the pressures of custom and tradition, and, on the other, her own desire for love and the conventional security of home and family."⁵ Willingly or not, the individual in the South is never alone, always in the company of relatives, comparing, pointing out positive or negative family traits, forced into a pattern of behavior, made to accept a code of manner and a certain type of behavior for the simple reason that it is the family tradition. While growing up, Miranda does not need to look into the outside world for examples and opinions, since her own family provides a large frame of lessons to learn, examples to follow, warnings, legends, half-revealed secrets, different versions of the past and of history, and especially, a sense of the impossibility to rise up to the standards imposed by the family heritage.

This attitude towards identity in the South is common in the Southern writers, coming from the awareness of the importance of history for the Southerner. Woodward, for instance, asserts that:

"Another deeply embedded trait of the Southern novelists that has strong appeal to the historian is their way of treating man not as an individual alone with his conscience and his God, as the New Englanders were inclined to do, or alone at sea with a whale or a marlin, or alone in a ring with a bull, but as an inextricable part of a living history and community, attached and determined in a thousand ways by other wills and destinies of people he has only heard about."⁶

He ranges Miranda together with Thomas Wolfe's Eugene Gant or William Faulkner's Quentin Compson as young Southerners trying to find their way out of the maze created by the past and shape their own identity by attempting to

⁵ Richard Gray, *A History of American Literature*, Blackwell Publishing, 2004, p. 432.

⁶ C. Vann Woodward, p.37.

reconcile past or family pressures with their own desire to be free and detach themselves from such a demanding experience.

In this context, Miranda's journey through childhood, as depicted in *The Old Order* (as well as partially in *Old Mortality* and *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*) becomes a journey through the labyrinth of her family's past as reconstructed mainly by the grandmother, but also by other family members or servants. In this light, it is not only Miranda's identity that is important. Miranda, through stories of the past, is presented with different female images and attitudes, from the stereotypical to the resistant, in order to highlight the fact that female identity in the old order is not taken from a fairy-tale. The silenced women hide stories of pain and humiliation, struggling to survive and to bring order into a male-dominated world.

The past, for the representatives of the old order, the grandmother and Aunt Nannie, becomes a patchwork of disconnected elements, cherished memories and forgotten suffering, together with a sense of worth coming from the belief of a life lived in a more ordered world than the present and their survival in such a world:

“They talked about the past, really – always about the past. Even the future seemed like something gone and done with when they spoke of it. It did not seem an extension of their past, but a repetition of it. They agreed that nothing remained of life as they had known it, the world was changing swiftly, but by the mysterious logic of hope they insisted that each change was probably the last; or, if not, a series of changes might bring them, blessedly, back full circle to the old ways they had known.”⁷

This cherishing of the past comes from a sense of stability given by the old ways and is translated into an obsession for order visible not only in Sophia Jane, the authoritative mistress, but also in her black slave, Aunt Nannie. Both of them had accepted the positions appointed to them and, throughout their lives, they tried to maintain the order and stability of their world through times of disorder and change. Wherever they go, even in their old age, they rearrange objects and organize people to fit the patterns they consider appropriate, or, as the grandmother puts it “It must be done *this way*, and no other!”⁸, reinforcing her authority and sense of order coming from a long family inheritance. For instance, each summer, the grandmother goes to the farm and rearranges everything, from the main house to the servants' cabins, while hearing their complaints and solving their conflicts. Even Aunt Nannie, though belonging to a lower social level and having, thus, less authority, is seen as a symbol of order, her departure from the house after the death of her mistress revealing her importance to the family: “Now and then, Nannie would come back up the hill for a visit. She worked then almost as she had before, with a kind of satisfaction in proving to them that she had been almost indispensable.”⁹

⁷ Katherine Anne Porter, *The Journey in The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter*, New York: Harcourt Books, 1979, p. 327.

⁸ Katherine Anne Porter, *The Fig Tree*, p. 354.

⁹ Katherine Anne Porter, *The Last Leaf*, p. 350.

Keeping order is in their blood and, actually, they represent the only stability in a changing world: “They [the children]” loved their Grandmother; she was the only reality to them in a world that seemed otherwise without fixed authority or refuge, since their mother had died so early that only the eldest girl remembered her vaguely: just the same they felt that Grandmother was a tyrant, and they wished to be free of her.”¹⁰ The reaction of the children foreshadows Miranda’s future attitude to the past and to the authority represented by the grandmother as well as the extent to which this sense of order is efficient in protecting the family from falling apart. To the Grandmother’s dismay, her efforts to keep the family together and her children well and happy fall to pieces: “She saw them all begin well, though not all of them ended so.”¹¹ She provided them with help and support, taking over the family affairs after her husband’s death and making sure that all her children benefit from financial support to make a good start in life. But with all her efforts, the family tradition she represents is about to disappear in the next generation where respect for family values and unity is no longer the rule.

Her failure to protect the family, on the one hand, and to preserve the rules of a more stable and controllable past, on the other, is visible in the little things: the disobedience of the grandchildren, the silent rebellion of her children, or the laziness of the black servants. Two of her sons, aged nine and eleven, run away from home, tired of constant work and harsh punishment, later on, they marry women she does not approve of and waste their fortunes and their lives. Her grandchildren, though under constant surveillance, keep doing forbidden things: stealing fruits, climbing trees, burning themselves with miniature blowtorches. The Negroes are lying in the shade during the hot summer days instead of working. And so, the world is only apparently under control despite the Grandmother’s firm belief that “such casualties were so minor a part of the perpetual round of events that they did not feel defeated nor that their strategy was a failure”¹². The young are looking for their own experiences, only partly listening to the stories of old and slowly detaching themselves from the rules imposed by the Grandmother, even with the risk of being physically harmed or emotionally broken.

This failure of the old rules comes from two sources: one is the natural need of the young to have their own share of experimentation in life and the other is the fact that these old rules do not have a solid foundation. The world of the past was neither ordered nor glamorous, or fit to become an example for the future generations; it was a world of injustice and violence that was gradually revealed from under the family legend of success, wealth and stability. The real history of the family parallels the real history of the South while the partial and nostalgic remembrance of some events in the detriment of the others is similar to the post Civil War effort to create an idyllic image of an Old South destroyed by War and by modern changes. Thus, the grandchildren find out about the Kentucky pioneer, the great-grandfather of their Grandmother, the balls and weddings uniting the

¹⁰ Katherine Anne Porter, *The Journey*, p. 324.

¹¹ *Idem*, p.339.

¹² *Idem*, p. 327.

whole family, the pioneering spirit that made the family move from Kentucky to Louisiana and then to Texas, in search of a better life, and also about the slave-trade with its violence and injustice, the unequal roles of men and of women, the difficulties in farming or other business enterprises, the Civil War and the hard period after it. In other words, they find out about the best, but also about the worst in their family and regional history.

Katherine Anne Porter, therefore, uses some of the clichés of the lost cause: the authoritative mistress who manages to keep the family together after the death of her husband, the war hero, the faithful and affectionate slaves, the closely knit family, with aunts, uncles and cousins all coming together to celebrate family events, with children brought up in the family tradition with the purpose of carrying it into the future despite the formal destruction of the Old South. But, like all the other writers of her period, these elements are used only to serve as a basis for the deconstruction of the myth of the Old South to reveal its flaws and violations in order to form a more coherent frame of reference for the future generations. In this context, the process of shaping the identity of the young Southerner caught between the pressures of a difficult and often ambiguous past inheritance and the lures of an uncertain future is doubled, here by the fact that this young Southerner is a woman growing up at the beginning of the twentieth century with examples of female self-sacrifice for the sake of the family represented by the old models and the promises of a modern, new world of self-fulfillment coming at the cost, though, of denying the domestic patterns, both models proving, in the end, in the case of Miranda, faulty and incomplete.

Metaphorically, this complicated image of the South is represented, in the second short story of the cycle entitled *The Journey*, by the quilts and other types of covers made by the Grandmother and Aunt Nannie. Reaching a moment where life is no longer a chain of tribulations, the two women seem to be the image, in a nutshell, of a romantic Southern past with mistress and slave sharing the same memories, sitting together, working, watching the children and recalling moments of their past which, bit by bit, will show not only their lives, but also the “order” of the old South, with its codes, traditions and stereotypes. The making of the covers opens the story that is entirely dedicated to the remembrance of the past, and especially of the lives of the two women, the white mistress and the black slave/ servant, pointing out not only the class and race differences, but mostly the similarities translated into the hardships they had to bear and the humiliations they had to endure, inherent part of their lives as women, beyond any limitations imposed by class or race:

“They shared a passion for cutting scraps of the family finery, hoarded for fifty years, into strips and triangles, and fitting them together again in a carefully disordered patchwork, outlining each bit of velvet or satin or taffeta with a running briar stitch in clear lemon-colored silk floss. They had contrived enough bed and couch covers, table spreads, dressing table scarfs, to have furnished forth several households. Each piece as

it was finished was lined with yellow silk, folded, and laid away in a chest, never again to see the light of day.”¹³

While sewing, the Grandmother and Aunt Nannie tell stories of old, complaining about the present and watching over the others (children or servants) around the house. Their memories are just like the pieces they cut: old, unused scraps brought to light, re-adorned and re-arranged in a different order, according to importance or affections. And just like the memories, the newly-made objects are buried again, forgotten once more, hidden from prying eyes, closed in chests. Memory, therefore, is seen as an unreliable foundation for a past that is given utmost importance in the present life; and even if it “had been bitter”, the memories are lined with golden silk and treasured since there is no question in their mind as to the “utter rightness and justice of the basic laws of human existence, founded as they were on God’s plan.”¹⁴ It is true that sometimes the two women questioned why so much suffering and pain could have been allowed in this great plan of the divinity, but they never questioned their assigned roles and never forgot their responsibilities, burying deep down their own doubts, desires, wishes and fears and sacrificing their private affections to the public duty:

“The Grandmother’s role was authority, she knew that; it was her duty to portion out activities, to urge or restrain where necessary, to teach morals, manners, and religion, to punish and reward her own household according to a fixed code. Her own doubts and hesitations she concealed, also, she reminded herself, as a matter of duty. Old Nannie had no ideas at all as to her place in the world. It had been assigned to her before birth, and for her daily rule she had all her life obeyed the authority nearest to her.”¹⁵

And so, the lives of the two women unfold within prescribed boundaries, allowing them little space for rebellion or for uttering their own doubts and discontentment, doing what was expected of them and enduring everything. Through their stories, the grandchildren, and especially Miranda, are introduced to roles assigned to them by belonging to a certain class and race, which separate the mistress from the slave, and the gender roles, bringing them together in a sort of solidarity created in common suffering and affection coming from sharing a life together up to the point when it is impossible to imagine one’s existence without the other. And thus, the story unfolds, constructing the image of the Southern lady and that of the black slave.

As far as the life of Sophia Jane is concerned, the image of the Southern belle: beautiful, virtuous, married well to a husband who takes care of her, the woman who would later become the wise mistress of the house is a beautiful cover for a life of struggle, suffering and humiliation. Sister, wife, mother and grandmother,

¹³ Idem, p. 326.

¹⁴ Idem, p. 327-8.

¹⁵ Idem, p. 328.

Sophia Jane lives long enough to see all the flaws of her family repeated in her children and grandchildren and finds all her efforts to correct them pointless. Though at first appearing as the spoiled daughter of a plantation owner, Sophia Jane learns that, in spite of her strong character, she belongs to a gender expected to obey, love and serve, prudently trying to cope with and correct the faults she finds in her family. Just like a curse that parallels the idea of the Southern curse, present as a recurrent pattern in Southern literature, the family mistakes and sins are forever repeated in a vicious circle that will never lead to evolution and improvement, but only to utter destruction. Thus:

“Their grandparents had been first cousins, and sometimes Sophia Jane saw in him, years after they were married, all the faults she had most abhorred in her elder brother: lack of aim, failure to act at crises, a philosophic detachment from practical affairs, a tendency to set projects on foot and then leave them to perish or to be finished by someone else; and a profound conviction that everyone around him should be happy to wait upon him hand and foot. She had fought these fatal tendencies in her brother, within the bounds of wifely prudence she fought them in her husband, she was long after fighting again in two of her sons and in several of her grandchildren. She gained no victory in any case, the selfish, careless, unloving creatures lived and ended as they had begun.”¹⁶

In other words, the life of Sophia Jane had been a life of fighting against men who assume a position of superiority which is not supported by the responsibilities coming with it. Katherine Anne Porter deconstructs the image of the patriarchal authority transmitted by the writers of plantation romances, an image that the nineteenth century Southern writers wanted to create about the South and that many Southerners accepted as it gave complete authority to the white man and created a positive image of the slave system:

“Implicit in this vision of the virtuous citizen was a shared understanding of patriarchy. The patriarchal family – that which ‘protected’ women, children, apprentices, servants, and slaves – was understood as the bedrock of society. The head of the household, the patriarchal ‘master,’ was invested with gender, generational, and class power as he represented his household in the public sphere.”¹⁷

In this idyllic vision upon the patriarchal institution, the man, representative of civilization, was expected to be “self-controlled, industrious, God-fearing, and respectful toward women, as witnessed in the institution of patriarchal Christian marriage.”¹⁸ In their turn, the women and the slaves are supposed to show their gratitude through obedience and loyalty. This image promoted in literature was favorable to the foundation of the white male’s authority. However, Katherine

¹⁶ Idem, p. 335.

¹⁷ Susan J. Tracy, *In the Master’s Eye. Representations of Women, Blacks and Poor Whites in Antebellum Southern Literature*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995, p. 16.

¹⁸ Idem, p. 15.

Anne Porter is ironic in dealing with typical gender roles in the Old South, by using the expected clichés and then overthrowing them. In her Texan landscape, men retain the authority and the desire to be absolute masters over their families, white and black, but fail to rise up to the responsibility coming with it. The writer tries to point out the meaninglessness of traditional views on the Southern society, stressing on the genuine roles of the silent others: women and slaves who are forced to become the real pillars of the family

Sophia Jane was raised to believe that tradition and old codes of behavior forced her to be obedient and submissive, hence the “prudence” with which she tries to correct the flaws she notices in her husband. Though she becomes more and more aware that, without her efforts, her family would fall apart, custom and the unwritten laws of the land do not allow her to fully assume the control of the family affairs, not even when she sees that their fortune is wasted first by her husband and then by her children:

“Her husband threw away her dowry and her property in wild investments in strange territories: Louisiana, Texas; and without protest she watched him play away her substance like a gambler. She felt like she could have managed her affairs profitably. But her natural activities lay elsewhere, it was the business of a man to make all decisions and dispose of all financial matters. Yet when she got the reins in her hands, her sons could persuade her to this and that enterprise or investment; against her will and judgment she accepted their advice, and among them they managed to break up once more the stronghold she had built for the future of her family.”¹⁹

Sophia Jane is neither weak, nor incapable of running her family business, but she knows that her activities are elsewhere, namely in the domestic area, women being confined, through education and tradition, to the closed space of the home, often helplessly watching how the men in the family are unable to carry on with their obligations. Sophia Jane’s ambitions do not lie, like those of the “new woman”, like those of her granddaughter Miranda, in professional fulfillment. She seems to have been contented to have a family life as the one presented in the plantation novels, but the story of her life contradicts it.

Moreover, bounded by tradition, limited by codes of behavior, unable to control her own life and save what is left to be saved for the sake of the family, doomed to watch helplessly how she is fated to a life of scarcity because of a weak husband, she is also humiliated by the society that allows men to abuse women, white or black, while denying to the latter the possibility to react or protect themselves, and to the former the right to be outraged:

“They [the young men] came visiting and they stayed, and there was no accounting for them not any way of controlling their quietly headstrong habits. She learned early to keep silent and give no sign of uneasiness, but whenever a child was born in the Negro quarters, pink, worm-like, she held her breath for three days, she told her

¹⁹ K.A. Porter, *The Journey*, p. 337

granddaughter, years later, to see whether the newly born would turn black after the proper interval.”²⁰

Though not being the one physically abused, the white woman has to endure the moral consequences of the acts of men and they have to learn how to cope with the humiliation and keep silent, as always concerning the affairs of men. And so, unlike the typical attitude expected of a Southern lady, she cannot help thinking: “She could not help it, she despised men. She despised them and was ruled by them.”²¹

And so, the fate of the white woman is attached to that of the black woman, both submitted to the will of the white master, though in different degrees. In the remembrance of a past whose purpose is to re-evaluate female identity in the old order, the presence of Nannie is compulsory, not as the shadow of her white mistress, but as a human being aware of the injustice of the system in such a degree that she even doubts the promise of a better life after death: “Nannie showed the rudiments of logic in a mind altogether untutored. She wondered, simply and without resentment, whether God, Who had been so cruel to people on earth, might not continue His severity in the next world. Miss Sophia Jane took pleasure in reassuring her; as if she, who had been responsible for Nannie, body and soul in this life, might also be her sponsor before the judgment seat.”²² Though a proof of care and tenderness, Sophia Jane’s attitude is also in keeping with the typical attitude of the white towards their black slaves whose lives they control up to the minutest detail. Religion, for instance, was one of the elements used as an argument for slavery by the Southerners, and also as a method for the further enslavement of the black, forced to embrace the religion of the oppressors.

The history of the lives of the two women ironically starts with the words “their friendship”, but, though true affection was established in time, at the beginning, the differences were evident. And so, “their friendship” starts when the little Sophia Jane, the spoiled daughter of a rich planter, states that she wants “the little monkey,” a small black girl who “had a potbelly and her arms were like sticks from wrist to shoulder”²³. The class and racial difference separating the two children is obvious not only in the attitude of the white girl who treats the black one no better than a pet, sharing her affections between her human companion and her pony Fiddler, but also in the state of poverty and starvation in which the little black girl is brought to the plantation, as well as in her memories from the slave auction or the way in which her former master called her “regular crowbait”, phrase to be repeated later, to Nannie’s shame, when she encounters him again.

²⁰ Idem, p.336.

²¹ Idem, p. 337.

²² Idem, p. 336-7.

²³ Idem, p. 330.

From this moment onward, the two women will share a life together, but still separate, Nannie having even less possibility to choose the course of her existence than her mistress or to react against injustice. While Sophia Jane grows up to be a Southern lady, Nannie becomes her personal slave, living in the main house, despised by whites and envied by her family who had never been anything else by field hands. When Sophia Jane gets married, Nannie is married off to a black man and offered as a wedding gift to the new bride, together with other objects and live stock. However, despite this racist attitude that she has to endure, she also enjoys the affection of her mistress. Having shared their lives since childhood, the two women cannot imagine life one without the other, defying the rules of the slave system and creating a space of female friendship and solidarity that undermines the typical images of white and black relationships. Chandra Wells, for instance, considers that it is exactly this solidarity and affection between the two women that forms the basis for their struggle to survive in a male-dominated world, that is why, Porter deconstructs the typical images of the white and the black woman, presenting the traditional, racially-charged relationships in a new light that does not rely on contrast, but rather on similarities:

“By writing white and African American characters who occupy common biological ground, Porter alters Sophia Jane’s whiteness and precludes a reading of her as precious and pure. Porter resists the plantation-fiction trope of defining black and white women in opposition to one another, by ascribing negative qualities to the black character in order to idealize the white one. . . . Nannie’s presence in *The Old Order* is an integral part of Porter’s project of reclaiming the image of white womanhood, which she reconstructs in terms of sensuality and strength rather than purity and weakness.”²⁴

The most obvious similarity between the white lady and the black slave in a world where, apparently, everything separates them, and also the basis of their growing solidarity lies in this “common biological ground” represented by childbirth and child rearing. In their old age, they complain about their grandchildren, in their youth, they supported one another through the painful process of giving birth to children, raising them or seeing them die.

Since the main perspective is that of the white woman, the reader learns about the experiences of the black woman through the memories of her mistress and only rarely through memories or comments of her own. Once more, their attitudes and behaviors are limited by custom and law reaching to the most intimate experiences of womanhood: child birth and the experience of maternity. Though presented as a devoted mother and grandmother, the only one capable to give strength and meaning to the family: sons, daughters, grandchildren, servants, even sisters and cousins, orbiting around her and depending upon her advice and care, Sophia Jane feels only rather late in her married life fulfillment as a mother. In the

²⁴ Chandra Wells, “‘Unable to Imagine Getting on without Each Other’: Porter’s Fictions of Interracial Female Friendship,” *Mississippi Quarterly: The Journal of Southern Cultures*, 58 (3-4), 2005 (Summer-Fall), p. 768.

slave system, a lady was only meant to have babies and then give them to the black slave to nurse, without any consideration for her own feelings. Therefore, she experiences the pain of childbirth, without being allowed to feel the joy of nursing her own babies.

The childbirth process is seen as a torture she shares with Nannie. The two women, white and black, are connected beyond the boundaries of race and class by the same feminine experiences: “Miss Sophia Jane and Nannie had then started their grim and terrible race of procreation, a child every sixteen months or so, with Nannie nursing both, and Sophia Jane, in dreadful discomfort, suppressing her milk with bandages and spirits of wine.”²⁵

The mystery of childbirth, probably the only thing that women, such as Sophia Jane and Nannie have, in this world, only for themselves is, again, tainted by obligations and traditions. It is evident that, in giving birth to babies, they are not on the path of self-fulfillment, but fulfill still more duties to men – duties as wives who have to bear heirs for the family future, in the case of the white lady, and duties as slaves to give birth to more slaves for the plantation, in the case of Nannie.

Motherhood, therefore, was ordered by class and race obligations, women being deprived of the happiness that comes with it by being forced to reject their natural feelings and behave according to rules established in society. In this world, the slave nurses the babies, feeding the masters’ baby often to the detriment of her own, which would explain why, out of the thirteen babies Nannie had, only three survived, while out of the eleven children of Sophia Jane, nine survived, suggesting the better care that the white children enjoyed. The situation is no better for the white woman either. Compelled by her belonging to the upper class, she is refused such an activity that is suitable only for lower-class women: breast-feeding, but which is an inherent part of the experience of maternity.

However, the outlook on the burdens of womanhood in the old order of the traditional South prompts a revelation of the unity between the two women outside barriers of class and race. If there are battles that Sophia Jane needs to face alone, especially concerning the relationship with her husband or the other men in the family and coming from her status as a Southern lady, wife and mother, there are also moments where the class and racial borders are eliminated, the two women being united, fighting the battles together by sharing their pain and consoling each other:

“Nannie and Sophia Jane lead lives that are indelibly marked by the distinctions of race and class, but Porter implies that these divisions are overshadowed by their common burdens as women within the old order. Both women are subordinate to white men and both must endure the compulsory maternity imposed on both black and white women in the old South. The endless cycle of pregnancy, childbirth, and child rearing that the women engage in, [...] represents biological common ground. Both Nannie and Sophia Jane are subject to the same physical processes of parturition and the

²⁵ K. A. Porter, *The Journey*, p. 334.

discomfort associated with them regardless of their racial and class identities, and the two women offer one another emotional support throughout these trials.²⁶

Disunited by class and race, that is by tradition and cultural heritage, in a world of social limitations and impositions, the two women are united by biology. They have found a space of their own, and though it is a space of physical pain, it is also a place of affections and emotional attachment, of support and understanding which they cannot find in the world ruled by men and which allows them to create a universe of their own, which they can control and in which they will not accept any interference.

However, this is not feminist rebellion against the unjust construction of the world since, in such a context, rebellion is not something that is accepted of a woman, and yet, the models that are offered to the young Miranda, that of her grandmother and of the old servant Aunt Nannie are not of utter submission. These are examples of strong and willful women who, though they do not shun from their obligations, or rebel against the injustice, are still able to find a space of their own, if not always of happiness, at least of order, care and tenderness. In establishing this connection with her black slave, based on sharing the same physical experiences, Sophia Jane goes farther in her affection and solidarity to the other woman, finding a happiness that she did not expect. Thus, when Nannie almost dies of puerperal fever, Sophia Jane takes on the role of nurse not only for her own baby, but also for that of the black woman, a situation that disagrees with all Southern laws. Despite her husband's attempt to forbid her to do such a thing and her mother's efforts to reason with her, Sophia Jane is awakened to a new sense of her own worth in the world, feeling that she had been cheated out of a wonderful experience. Since she cannot fight on equal terms with her husband, with law and tradition, she can, at least, impose her will in the only place where she, as a woman, has the slightest power: the experience of motherhood. Betrayed on almost all layers of her existence, she feels that the joys of feeding the babies at least compensate not only for the pain during childbirth, but also for "what she missed in the marriage bed, for there also something had failed."²⁷

The impossibility of sexual fulfillment, in Sophia Jane, is substituted by gratification in motherhood, making sure that she will never be cheated again. Moreover, she will, against all laws, nurse the black baby, never favoring her own child and treating them equally. She will, later on, keep a special kind of affection for the black child she nursed. Porter, therefore, destroys the typical image of a Southern lady in the old South, by rendering Sophia Jane color-blind and allowing the primacy of affectionate bonds over artificial constructions of class and race:

"Sophia Jane is hardly depicted as a revolutionary; she conforms outwardly to many of the strictures of the old order, even as she rebuffs them in her heart. Yet, by stepping

²⁶ C. Wells, p. 766-7.

²⁷ K.A. Porter, *The Journey*, p.334

off the figurative pedestal and rejecting (at least partially) her culture's gender paradigms, Sophia Jane acquires a more labile identity than that of a 'lady.' [...] Accordingly, the formation of an interracial friendship becomes for Porter's characters a crucial strategy for survival in a culture antagonistic to women's autonomy."²⁸

She therefore locates the possibility of female self-fulfillment in the realm of biological impositions since the social world, dominated by men, confines women in well-established slots that control behaviors and attitudes. Sophia Jane and Nannie are meant to be "the Southern lady" and "the black slave" in a world that already decided what these images should be, irrespective of personal desires and motivations. Childbirth and motherhood, though apparently under the control of the same social system, become spaces of freedom for women, of emotional fulfillment and ultimately of survival. In this world, ready-made images like that of *lady* or *slave* disappear in front of shared suffering and female solidarity.

Therefore, Sophia Jane, a woman of apparent weaknesses and vanities, like the love for luxury, a resentment for criticism and a strong belief that her ideas are right, a hot temperament, a "deadly willfulness," attributes not acceptable in a Southern lady, is, in fact, a proud, honest, human being unwilling to stand and watch how her family falls apart. Her role in the Miranda stories is, only partially, to offer to the girl and later the young woman an image of the past and of the situation of women in the nineteenth century South who are valued only for beauty and their ability to bear children (actually, both Sophia Jane and Nannie are proud of how many children they had). Miranda is supposed to learn about the submissive attitude of women, about class and race and though this situation is unjust and not likely to become a good model to follow, it is also part of a cultural heritage that forces Sophia Jane and Nannie to accept it and Miranda to find it difficult to reject. On the other hand, Porter does not let things fall into their places so easily, by using a ready-made image of the Southern lady, as depicted in the plantation novel and allowing Miranda, the modern consciousness, to easily detach from it. Sophia Jane is a complicated model to follow. Raised in the old South, she is, in many ways, a typical representative of that world: wife and mother, she learns when she needs to be prudent and when she needs to be silent, but, she is also aware of the utter injustice of a system that confines women's freedom and forces them to submit to a life that brings them mostly pain, frustration and humiliation and so, she learns when she can step up and fight for her right to choose.

There seem to be several strategies to insure the survival of the feminine identity in a world controlled by men. For Sophia Jane as well as for Nannie, for instance, the keyword seems to be "order." If Nannie can only endure and accept, Sophia Jane can act, keeping the black servant close to her in her fight for survival. And so, whatever causes her to be afraid and suffer is perceived as disordered, chaotic and uncontrollable, starting from the attitudes of men to her own most

²⁸ C. Wells, p. 770.

intimate dreams and desires. Consequently, she tries to order her universe, create a frame of control that will protect her from chaos and fear. Hence, the obsession with order that will follow her all through her life, as a wife, as a single mother and then as a grandmother, is visible in the way in which she arranges the disordered pieces of cloth, binds them together with silk threads to make different types of covers. In other words, her fight against the destruction she sees in the world of men is through order and unity, as Sophia Jane becomes the force that keeps the family together, considering that this is the only space for a woman of her condition in a male-dominated world to fulfill herself. It is not rebellion or revolution, but survival. After her death, the old Nannie, though leaving the family house and spending her last days alone in a cabin, comes regularly to visit and order the house, proving her importance for the family. The old order is not a perfect world, but it remains a solid frame of reference for the younger generations and as an example, as far as women are concerned, of self-sacrifice and endurance for the sake of the family.

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FROM KATHERINE MANSFIELD TO BONNIE BURNARD

MIHAELA MUDURE¹

ABSTRACT. *From Katherine Mansfield to Bonnie Burnard.* This paper is a comparative close reading of two short stories: Katherine Mansfield's *The Wind Blows* and Bonnie Burnard's *Music Lessons*. The comparison leads to more general conclusions about the importance of the image of the child in post-colonial literatures.

Keywords: childhood, postcolonial, Katherine Mansfield, Bonnie Burnard, music lesson

REZUMAT. *De la Katherine Mansfield la Bonnie Burnard.* Această lucrare este o lectură comparativă de tipul *close reading* a două nuvele: *The Wind Blows* de Katherine Mansfield și *Music Lessons* de Bonnie Burnard. Comparația duce la concluzii mai generale privind importanța imaginii copilului în literaturile post-coloniale.

Cuvinte cheie: copilărie, postcolonial, Katherine Mansfield, Bonnie Burnard, ora de muzică

This paper is a close reading exercise that involves Katherine Mansfield's short story *The Wind Blows* and Bonnie Burnard's short story *Music Lessons*. Analyzing the narrative similarities and dissimilarities, the possible echoes from the famous New Zealander's short stories to the emerging-to-fame Canadian writer's short fictions, we try to answer a difficult and challenging question: is it a case of intertextuality or is it a case of reality, desire, and imagination as finally, all writers try to give answers to the same few and basic answers? Our comparison will also point to the two writers' preference for depicting that ineffable age when childhood ripens into adolescence and the child starts perceiving the world as an adult. The extent to which childhood is a *topos* in post-colonial literatures justifies the idea that we should surpass the limits of the two short stories and try to make certain statements about the post-colonial mentality and its literary expression.

The most frequent term of comparison for Katherine Mansfield's life, stories, style or modernism is, certainly, her contemporary rival Virginia Woolf, one of the luminaries of the Bloomsbury Circle. One of the most recent such

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comparative exercises is the surprising work of Jane Nardin "Poultry for Dinner in Katherine Mansfield's *Prelude* and Virginia Woolf's *The Shooting Party*" which uses poultry as the symbol of violence against women. We have decided to choose a more unusual term of comparison for Mansfield, Bonnie Burnard, another post-colonial writer, an emerging personality in Canadian literature.

Bonnie Burnard was born in Ontario, in 1945. Up to now has published three novels *Women of Influence* (1988), *A Good House* (1999), and *Suddenly* (2009) and a collection of short stories *Casino & Other Stories* (1995). "Music Lesson" is from this 1995 collection.

The only association that I could find between Burnard and the literature from and of the Antipodes is a comparison between Bonnie Burnard and Patrick White in a review by Carol Shields to one of Burnard's novels. "The Australian novelist Patrick White once announced that he had no interest in 'plots,' that he was only concerned with writing about life going on toward death. This is precisely the narrative arc Bonnie Burnard has chosen and so brilliantly brought into being. It is a daring feat, and one that will move the reader to recognition and, at times, to tears. Our literature needs this kind of real wealth, our own lives given back to us in the form of enduring language" (C12). This "writing about life going on toward death", the awareness that life is short and fragile and can never return, hence it is unique, these are also Mansfieldian concerns, ideas, themes.

Though not a short story preferred by literary critics and historians for their analytical exercises and theoretical analyses, *The Wind Blows*, especially its first part, is certainly one of the most sensitive Mansfieldian short stories. The text is constructed upon the metaphor of the blowing wind, the natural representation of the tumult of life. The short story is divided into two parts connected by the wind ravaging consciousnesses, lives, and human lives. The story was inspired by the death of Mansfield's brother who was killed in a train accident, in 1915. The little girl that has music lessons and is attracted into an undeclared love affair with her music teacher is the same who, years later, after the music incident – as a grown up woman – would walk on the esplanade of the harbour with her brother. Years later she would remember that day when she realized that the thing unsaid can bring about one of those epiphanies when you realize the meaning of life. And what is the meaning of life? The meaning of life is that the ship is gone and will never return. The writer's capacity of creating a fragmented discourse that follows the ups and downs of emotions is amazing, and probably unique in English literature. Also amazing is Mansfield's capacity to look at the brother-sister couple both from the inside and the outside. The writer turns this brotherly couple into a symbolic *figura* that represents love and the endurance of love. Remarkable is that Mansfield is able to stop on the verge of the erotic. A permanent presence in this short story is the wind blowing. Time, lapse of personal chronology, the ups and down of life, all of these and much more are the possible interpretations of the blowing wind.

The two short stories *The Wind Blows* and *Music Lessons* have a lot of commonalities. We do not know for sure whether Bonnie Burnard was aware of Mansfield's text when she wrote her piece. Still Burnard's awareness of the Mansfieldian text is not impossible. We must also mention that Burnard's story has a certain Gothic atmosphere which is fully explainable by Burnard's origin. The Gothic literary school of the Ontario is not without traces in Burnard's *Music Lessons*. On the contrary, the Mansfieldian music lesson from *The Wind Blows* is melancholic but serene. The acceptance of life and its transience is completely internalized. With Burnard, the thing unsaid is a negative epiphany that keeps us away from the ultimate meanings of life because they hide terror and fear in their sublime.

Undoubtedly, the narrative point of view in both these texts belongs to a representative of "that little subclass of well off girls" (Burnard, 433). The music lesson is not only a marker of social class but also a chronotope with special emotional significance. The relation between the student and the teacher is different in such private music lessons. Teaching is accompanied by reciprocal knowledge, friendship, even more sometimes. All this emotional growth overflows in epiphanic moments that lead the young characters to a more profound, a deeper understanding of life. They learn about boundaries and emotional drives which you have to resist because otherwise society, as an ordering system, would go into chaos and anarchy. Society has to be strict because our intimate nature is diverse, multiple, versatile.

The couple made up of the teacher and the music student is severely watched, in both stories, by the community. It is as if the society were jealously watching this intimate space of honest and sincere feelings where love can surpass the conventions and the limitations imposed by convention and dusty formality. In Mansfield's story it is Marie Swainson, the girl-after-her, who comes "hours before her time" (109) and who interrupts a very intimate moment that could have taken an erotic course. The affection between Robert Bullen and his private student verges on infantile abuse, from a very traditional, strict perspective. But Mansfield, a woman with a revolutionary, unconformist behaviour herself, rather suggests that social classifications and rules are not able to discern properly what is immoral and dirty when genuine feelings are involved. Human affection can take forms that society finds it difficult to classify and then it simply bans them because it is easier to forbid than to understand.

The miraculous writer that was Katherine Mansfield sheds some kind of ambiguity in her characters, an ambiguity that is even more normal as humans are rarely paragons of goodness or evil. We don't know for sure anything about the music teacher's emotional involvement. He may just be in love with himself and use these girls blooming into adolescence for his own selfish complacency that he is still a man capable of arousing feelings which he does not have to satisfy in any way. He refuses to take any responsibility in this game preferring to arouse than to fulfill. Is there also some impotence hidden, suggested in his behaviour? Or is it only caution, fear, conformity? Impotence and vicarious living are not impossible with a man who lives

with “the pale photograph of Rubinstein ... *à mon ami Robert Bullen*” (107) on his desk. The photography of the famous pianist is probably an old souvenir, a relic of the almost forgotten ambitions when Robert Bullen may have attracted the great man’s attention by his musical gifts! There is some circular repetitiveness in Mansfield’s story which endangers the potentiality of genuine romantic feeling and even brings in some discreet humour. Matilda is eager to get to the music teacher. “The windows are closed, the blinds half pulled, and she is not late” (107). The inside intimacy created by the closed windows and by the half pulled blinds is destroyed by Matilda’s abrupt arrival. “The girl-before-her has just started playing MacDowell’s ‘To an Iceberg.’ Mr. Bullen looks over at her and half smiles. ‘Sit down,’ he says. ‘Sit over there in the sofa corner, little lady.’” (107). The same ritual occurs when Marie Swainson bursts into Matilda’s class.

“Suddenly the door opens and in pops Marie Swainson, hours before her time.
‘Take the allegretto a little faster,’ says Mr. Bullen, and gets up and begins to walk up and down again.
Sit in the corner, little lady,’ he says to Marie” (109).

And everything resumes like the eternal biological watch that ticks the same in all girls, like the eternal destiny that all take in and all are taken in.

In Bonne Burnard’s story the narrator is also a female private student. The teacher is a woman, Mrs. Summers, who is married. The erotic dimension is subliminal to the point of non-existence because it hovers on the dangerous territory of lesbianism. Intimacy is beautifully rendered by a metaphor involving swap of minds and swap of clothes. “The substance of our minds, like the contents of our closets, was swapped and shared in a continuous and generous game” (433).

The loss of virginity, which is symbolic in the Mansfieldian story, becomes concrete and normal in the privileged environment of Mrs. Summers’ home. “She was encouraging our adolescence when everyone else was extremely busy avoiding it. In her time, she said, girls had been bound tight and flat” (433).

The ritual at the beginning of the class focuses on Mrs. Summers who opens the door herself. “She walked erect, patting her hair to ensure that no grey blonde strands had escaped the chignon, straightening her gown; it was always a gown, full and rich with colour. And always, just before she put her hand to the knob, she prepared a smile. With the swing of the door came a rush of smells: furniture polish and perfume and smoke from the fire in the winter. And her voice, across the threshold, ‘Elizabeth dear,’ as if surprised, delighted” (434). Here is the teacher opening the door and the students are invited in. Students never open the door themselves. The Mansfieldian teacher is much more self-centred and creates a more-knit universe which leads to suspicions of emotional bonds that break moral conventions between adults and children. In Burnard’s story, the female teacher invites the child in. Only the smile accompanying the invitation is common to both teachers. They both rely on these private classes as their main income source and courtesy is a must. The smile is also for the community. Nothing that is not

permissible is going on during these music lessons. The moral Big Brother can relax.

Mrs. Summers lives together with her husband, Mr. Summers. It is a presence that means a big difference in the narrative economy of the short story. "I could always feel Mr. Summers in the house when I took my lesson, though he never coughed or answered the phone" (434), confesses the hard working student of Mrs. Summers. The big revelation happens after Mr. Summers' death. The life of the Summers was more complicated than anybody would have imagined. A picture of the married couple and another picture of "five men, all young" (435) makes a lot of difference. Among the young men in the picture, there are Elizabeth's grand-father and a couple: "[t]wo others, though not alike, leaned in a shared pose against the hoods of large dark cars" (435). They are lovers, we may easily presume. The community wants to punish Mrs. Summers' permissiveness and her husband's way of life. But Elizabeth's mother refuses to conform. Private music lessons would continue. "My friends hounded me for a while about the lovers, about the possibility of deeper, darker things, eager for oddity at least, not perversity" (436).

Notice that in Mansfield's story the community is just spoken of. Matilda hates her mother who is conventional and teasing. The relation between Matilda and her mother is a sample for the way in which elderly women want to impose the patriarchal rule, from which they themselves may have suffered, upon the younger ones. This is the only way they can think of in order to protect their offspring from being punished for trespassing the unbeatable rules of patriarchy. Robert Bullen, an old bachelor, is careful not to arouse any suspicions that might cut his precious income and affect his public image. In Burnard's story, the epiphany leads to the revelation of a lesbian continuum, in Adrienne Rich's acceptance². I am referring to Elizabeth's symbolic gesture to clean and paint the stairs, as Mr. Summers, becomes "what my mother had once called a moral choice, a choice that would make my life easier, or harder" (437). Mrs. Summers' reaction should be, according to Elisabeth's hopes, a hug and some sobbing that let go tension and pain. Words are not necessary. Nor are they said, in fact. The thing unsaid is the gesture that creates and accepts the lesbian continuum. The writer does not feel the need do creating some verbal reaction that might clarify the situation and its ambivalence. "She came at me with her arms out and though there was no way to tell whether she was going to pound me or lean on me or hug me, I could not have run. Her hands were firm on my shoulders; the sound she made was loud and brutal and almost young" (437).

Both Mansfield and Burnard have a preference for the child figure. It is a centrality that comes from the post-colonial condition. The historical youth of post-colonial societies, the violence of the colonial enterprises that imposed other values upon entire communities and infantilized them in the historical game for power, all

² In Adrienne Rich's seminal essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" the lesbian continuum is a form of female solidarity, bonding that is sexualized, at one end and purely affectionate, at the other.

these led to disquieting questions about roots and future which affect, primarily, children. The result is this predilection for infantile representation. The child is both part of the post-colonial artistic and epistemic strategy and a reader who is very important for the young postcolonial literatures. In his “Introduction” to his book *Voices of the Other and the Postcolonial Context*, Roderick McGillis considers that postcolonialism is an “activity of mind” (XXII). In this acceptance postcolonialism “is quite simply intent on both acknowledging the history of oppression and liberating the study of literature from traditional and Eurocentric ways of seeing” (XXII). Children’s literature and children’s representation lead to discussions about multiculturalism in its specific postcolonialism shape, race, cultural appropriation and pedagogy as a power tool that influences children’s education. On the other hand, in postcolonial cultures the child also becomes a cultural symbol, a representation of the subaltern by his very condition. He is dependent upon the adults. In her book *Unsettling Narratives: Postcolonial Readings of Children’s Literature*, Clare Bradford focuses on children’s literature from Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, picture books and films trying to “read” children as readers and citizens-to-become of postcolonial nations³. She finds the ambivalent nature of these texts in the multiplicity of positions children can have against the postcolonial frame.

We find this ambivalence in Mansfield’s and Burnard’s short stories as well. It is beyond doubt that Katherine Mansfield’s *The Wind Blows* and Bonnie Burnard’s *Music Lessons* can be included into the wide and, now, very effervescent field of children’s literature. They can help the young readers understand their own emotions and the difficulty of getting inscribed into the unavoidable patriarchal frame of post-colonized and post-colonizing societies. They are post-colonized in relation to their historical past. They are post-colonizing in relation with the power relations they want to implement within their own space. On the other hand, in both these texts, children are metaphors for any beginnings, for purity, for naivety, for innocence. The huge difference between several generations of post-colonial writers, such as Katherine Mansfield and Bonnie Burnard, is that emerging emotions get more overt and more diverse expressions and the conforming communities loosen their grip upon individuals. The infantile metaphor endures but hierarchies, at least, seem less oppressive. The skies are opening.

³ This acceptance of postcolonialism may also be important for other cultural areas with so-called young nations, such as Central or Eastern Europe. “Postcolonialism in literature refers to a self-consciousness on the part of emerging peoples of a history, a culture, and an identity separate from and just as important as those of the imperial “masters” (Roderick McGillis, “Introduction” *Voices of the Other and the Postcolonial Context*, p. XXIII). There is still too little research on children’s literature in these cultures and the importance of the figure of the child during the emergence of the young European nations in the nineteenth century is yet to be tackled.

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MYTHOLOGICAL FIGURES IN CONSTRUCTING CHICANA IDENTITY IN SANDRA CISNEROS' SHORT STORIES

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ABSTRACT. *“Mythological Figures in Constructing Chicana Identity in Sandra Cisneros’ Short Stories”.* Mexican-American writer Sandra Cisneros turns to the mythical-historical figure of La Malinche and La Llorona processing, reinterpreting and adding to the valences of the two mythological figures in order to rebuilt and reassert Chicana identity. The aim of this study is to investigate the way in which Sandra Cisneros remodels and reinterprets the essence of two of the most prominent mythological female figures drawn directly from the Hispanic heritage of Mexican American culture in two of her short stories, *Little Miracles*, *Kept Promises* and *Woman Hollering Creek*, where use of mythological figures for redefining identity is most visible.

Keywords: women writers, mythology, La Llorona, La Malinche, Sandra Cisneros, love, betrayal.

REZUMAT. *„Figuri mitologice în construcția identității chicana în povestirile Sandrei Cisneros”.* Scriitoarea americană de origine mexicană, Sandra Cisneros, recurge la prelucrarea unor figuri mitico-istorice, La Malinche și La Llorona, pentru reconfigurarea și revalorizarea identității Chicana. Scopul lucrării de față este de a investiga modul în care scriitoarea alege să remodeleze și să reinterpreteze aceste figuri mitologice feminine, adânc înrădăcinate în moștenirea hispanică a culturii mexican-americană, în două dintre povestirile ei, *Little Miracles*, *Kept Promises* și *Woman Hollering Creek*, povestiri construite prin utilizarea mitologicului pentru redefinirea identității.

Cuvinte cheie: scriitoare, mitologie, La Llorona, La Malinche, Sandra Cisneros, dragoste, trădare.

Women writers resort to the imaginative space of mythology to better understand the symbols by which women are described, to challenge patriarchal hegemony and to raise “a new consciousness” as Gloria Anzaldúa calls it. (Anzaldúa in Larrington, 1992: 412). In the 1960’s feminist activists opened towards feminine

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mythology. They turned to mythology to choose names for their groups: the Furies (lesbian feminist collective) or Cassandra (radical feminist nurses). The Medusa became a symbol of women's rage against the phallogocentric system of values. In myth and tradition lies power and therefore women writers assumed the role of rebuilding tradition and dismantling the conventional patriarchal history by resorting to mythological figures, popular tales and beliefs.

According to Roland Barthes, socially constructed myths and narratives get assimilated and naturalized, and form conceptual and behavioral patterns. Therefore, the process of changing mentalities and attitude calls for the repositioning and reinterpretation of female mythological figures, in the process of reconstructing tradition and identity. The trans-historical essence of myths and their multifaceted character allow for shifting the perspective from which the story is told. This mechanism functions as means of empowerment and legitimates the claim for a change in status: "We are the myths. We are the Amazons, the Furies, the Witches. We have never not been here, this exact silver of time, this precise place" (Robin Morgan in Larrington, 1992: 431).

The corpus of writings we have chosen in order to illustrate Cisneros's way of 'manipulating' two of the most prominent mythological characters in Mexican-American mythology, La Malinche and La Llorona, consists of two short stories, namely *Little Miracles*, *Kept Promises* and *Woman Hollering Creek* published in the collection of short stories *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*, a volume which was awarded the PEN Center West Award prize for best fiction and nominated *Best Book of Fiction* by *The New York Times* and *The American Library Journal* in 1991. The reason behind the choice resides in the author's artistry of manipulating mythological figures in these particular two short-stories.

Little Miracles, *Kept Promises* and *Woman Hollering Creek* shall be investigated within contrastive approach in order to understand how Sandra Cisneros goes back to myths and history and processes their essence in an attempt to reconstruct tradition and identity within the community she represents.

Sandra Cisneros was called by the *Boston Globe* "the impassioned bard of the Mexican border" (Gilbert and Gubar, 1996: 576). A *bard* goes back in time up to the moment when these myths were born, witnesses and re-tells them in a poetic manner. Cisneros herself admitted in an interview by Robert Birnbaum that while writing the above-mentioned collection of short stories she assumed the role of the author as a witness of the community, "*Caramelo* was for my father and for the immigrants. *Woman Hollering* was for the community. *House on Mango Street* was for my students."²

The writer belonging/witnessing (to) the community, writes about/for that community in order to create a sense of new awareness, to make them see/understand themselves from a more complex perspective and offers them a new mythos by which they can redefine their identity:

² Interview with Sandra Cisneros by Robert Birnbaum, <http://www.sandracisneros.com/articles.php>, accessed on November 16

“[...]to hold up mirrors: from the Mexicans to see themselves from the point of view of the Mexican-Americans. Mexican-Americans to see themselves from the point of view of the Mexicans, Americans as seen by Mexicans, all those mirrors that get refracted”. (Cisneros, interview Robert Birnbaum)

Sandra Cisneros turns to the mythical-historical figure of La Malinche and La Llorona processing, reinterpreting and adding to the valences of the two mythological figures.

La Malinche is a historical figure whose identity was enriched and transformed by myth. Most historians agree that she was the daughter of a noble Aztec family whose life turned into a series of misfortunes after her father's death when she was sold as slave by her mother. Her owner, Cacique of Tabasco offered her to Cortes as present together with other nineteen slave girls. They changed her name into Marina. Given her noble prior status, she was well brought and educated: she could speak the Mayan dialects used in the Yucatan while still understanding Nahuatl, the language used by Aztecs and several other Non-Mayan Indians. Shortly she became Cortes's guide, translator, lover, confidante and some sources say that she also played an active role in Cortes' strategic planning. She and Cortes had a son, Don Marin Cortes and, by giving birth to the first 'recorded' *metizo*, she becomes the mother of an entire nation. There are several different versions on how the relationship with Cortes ended. History says that when Cortes left for Spain, he married her with one of his subordinates, a Castilian knight, Don Juan Xamarillo. However, there is also an alternative legendary ending their relationship, which turns her into the equivalent of the Greek Medea. She is said to have killed her child by Cortes to get revenge for his leaving her, obviously believing that the child belongs mainly to the father.

Apart from the historical accounts, she survived as a mythological figure, as the mother of the nation, of the *metizos*. She was charged with negative symbolism and associated with the negative aspects of national identity and sexuality. The term 'malinchista' derives from her name and the historian Fernando Horcasitas explains that, “a *Malinchista* is a person who disdains the native ways of life and always favors the foreigner for profit or because of a feeling of inferiority” (apud Taylor). So her figure was charged with such concepts as “treason,” “betrayal,” and “sell-out.” John Taylor points out political aspects into the processing of the character:

“Malinche was suddenly portrayed as the beautiful temptress who conquered and destroyed her own people. They effectively built this language and imagery around her in a deliberate campaign, with purely political objectives: to promote the Indian heritage of the Mexican people, while making Malinche into an “anti-heroine, a national Judas,” and the scapegoat for three centuries of colonial rule.”

As John Taylor points out in his work *Reinterpreting Malinche*, her treason is not necessarily that of her people. By deviating from expected behavior, La Malinche is a traitor of her own community only to the extent that she betrays patriarchal values:

“The nature of Malinche’s role as mistress to Puertocarrero and Cortés, and later as wife to Jaramillo, seems to make this so-called “sexual betrayal” plausible. But what choice did she have? Being handed from man to man was not her choice, but her fate. She was the victim of the patriarchal view of the time, that women were objects for man’s exploitation. Her story was surely one of rape and misuse, first by the indigenous people and later by the Spanish. What could she have done? What would she have accomplished by resisting? So, she used her ability as a translator to remain visible, and stood strong as a woman in a man’s world. Therefore, to accuse her of “sexual betrayal” is to misrepresent the evidence.”

The other female mythological figure we will analyze against Sandra Cisneros’ writings is La Llorona. La Llorona is a Chicano folktale which some authors consider of Spanish origin. It tells the story of ‘the weeping woman’. The legend says that there was a beautiful young girl, so aware of her beauty that she would refuse to marry anyone but the most handsome man on earth. And the day came when a very handsome man came into the village and took her as his wife and they started a family. When her husband left her she threw her children into the river out of madness. When she realized what she had done she ran after her children. The next day she was found dead on the river bank. They buried her, but that night they heard a shrieking cry of "Oh my children!" Legend has it that she wanders the river at night looking for her children. Therefore, children are not supposed to ramble by the river at night as La Llorona might mistake them for her own children and take them. A second version of the La Llorona story is that she appears to young men who roam about at night. The young men believe that she is a young, beautiful woman, but when they approach her with sexual intent in mind, she shows herself to be a terrible image of death personified.

La Llorona has thus been associated with death and water. Even if this figure is largely associated with evil; she also became a symbol of sadness and pain and throughout the years the story has acquired new valences and the tale came to be associated with lost love and used in sad love poems.

Rudolfo Anaya, one of the founders of contemporary Chicano literary canon, also uses this folktale figure in his book *The Legend of La Llorona: A Short Novel* (1984) suggesting that it derives from La Malinche. The two characters overlap. They both mate with the stranger and experience a tragic liberation from motherhood and ‘wifeness’, symbolic for the denial of patriarchic values. Thus, La Llorona is also attributed betrayal valences.

The figure of La Malinche apparently fascinated Sandra Cisneros since she uses this character or at least part of its symbolism in several short stories. There are potential Malinces in her novel *The House on Mango Street* as well. Betrayal of the community through refusing the statute of wife and mother or through mating with the stranger or even wanting to be with/like the Others, all these are issues that can be encountered in her writings. But in this paper we shall investigate La Malinche in the short story *Little Miracles, Kept Promises*, and we shall see how La Llorona is transformed in *Woman Hollering Creek*.

Little Miracles, Kept Promises is a collage composed of 'millagritos', short letters containing requests, wishes, thanks, addressed to a protective saint, to the Virgin or to Christ. Apparently it has no central narrator or character apart from the shrine, which seems to be the only connector among them. However the last letter frames the others and gives the reader some sense of organization through opposition. All but the last one seem to follow the same line of earthly concerns. The letter of Rosario de Leon breaks with the others and turns towards a monologue expressing the reflections of a woman confronted with and aware of the two different cultures she belongs to, that of the Christianity and that of the Aztecs.

The first part of the short story is assigned to the community. It is made up of the voices of the community, uttering their problems evident in the lives of Chicanos and Chicanas, which range from serious to comic. They form one heterogeneous whole in characterizing that particular community of South Texas Mexican – Americans in the same time offering a panoramic perspective of Mexican – American life in general, striving to cope with two distinct cultures. We can find here voices that testify for the patriarchic traditional society: the place of the oldest daughter is at home, helping her parents and 'she can just forget about school', the family depending on the man's material support, a young girl should get married and become a mother, no homosexuality approved.

The multitude of tones rendered through the use of slang, lack of punctuation, the use of Spanglish give the impression of direct communication reminding of the oral tradition of the Chicanos, the style of *declamatores* and of the *corrido*.

The second part of the short story is the monologue of Rosario de Leon and it is here that we find La Malinche. Her voice is set against the voices of the community. She is the traitor who would not accept to live by the patriarchic rules. Her betrayal consists of refusing to play the role she is supposed to within the community, the role imposed upon her by her being born a female. One can find other possible Malinces among the other female voices. We have for instance Ms. Barbara Ibanez who says:

"Can you please help me find a man who isn't a pain in the neglas. There aren't any in Texas. [...] Can you send me a man man. I mean someone who's not ashamed to be seen cooking or cleaning or looking after himself. [...] I'll turn your statue upside down until you send him to me. I've put up with too much too long, and now I'm just too intelligent, too powerful, too beautiful, too sure of who I am finally to deserve anything else." (Cisneros, 1991: 118)

She does challenge to some extent the mentality of the community by not accepting that a woman should be a 'washing-cooking-children raising machine', but still she wants to preserve a pure form of womanhood: become a wife and probably procreate.

There is also Teresa Galindo who found a man, but she realizes that being a wife is a cross she cannot carry:

“... you granted me my petition and sent, just as I asked, a guy who would love only me, because I was tired of looking at girls younger than me [...] with a guy’s arm hooked around their neck.

So what is I’m asking for? Please, Virgencita. Lift this heavy cross from my shoulders and leave me like I was before, wind on my neck, my arms swinging free, and no one telling me how I ought to be.” (122)

The subtlety of her request, it’s lack of strength and determination to fight the coercions of society turns her into failing Malinche. There would be another somehow paradoxical La Malinche, Benjamin T. who is a homosexual and thus a traitor of the traditional values in a reversed way. However he is too silent and too is afraid of anyone finding out about his sexual preferences.

The only ‘real’ La Malinche remains Rosario – a Malinche with a voice and an attitude. She cuts her hair and strongly refuses to be anybody’s wife or anybody’s mother. She is an artist and only men are allowed to be artists.

“I don’t want to be a mother.

I wouldn’t mind being a father. At least a father could still be artist, could love *something* instead of *someone*, and no one would call that selfish.”(127)

She is also aware of her hybrid nature, of her belonging (and not-belonging) to two different cultures at the same time. There is Christianity on one hand and the tradition of the ancient Aztec warriors on the other: “ I’m a bell without a clapper. A woman with one foot in this world and one foot in that. A woman straddling both. This thing between my legs. This unmentionable.” (125). She strongly assumes her role as La Malinche, her condition as the traitor, the one ready to demolish the pre-established patriarchal hierarchy of values. Not only does she refuse to be like the other women in the family, but she is almost ‘one of them’, one of the whites/ the Others. She integrated in their system, she is educated, awoken and aware. She crossed the border through education, and the need of education for women is one of the main claims of the feminist movement.

“don’t think it was easy going without you. Don’t think I didn’t get my share of it from everyone. Heretic. Atheist. *Malinchista. Hacicono*. But I wouldn’t shut my yap. My mouth always getting me in trouble. *is that what they teach you at the university? Miss High-and-Mighty. Miss Thinks-She’s-Too-Good-For-Us*. Acting like a *bollila*, a white girl. *Malinche*. Don’t think it didn’t hurt being called a traitor. Trying to explain to my ma, to my *abuela* why I didn’t want to be like them.” (128)

The story of Rosario revolves around the Virgin, as she herself feels La Malinche, thus reiterating the Mexican paradigm, which consists of the opposition of the two as positive versus negative examples of behavior for a woman within the traditional society:

“The nationalists’ purpose was to indoctrinate women into accepting a subordinate position to men, making them socially, physically, and psychologically dependent, and transforming them into invisible, lifeless, worthless, devalued objects. Thus,

the nationalists created a paradigm for Mexico with polarized perspectives of women: Malinche represented pure evil, the 'Mexican Eve,' on one side, and Mary the mother of Jesus represented supreme good, *La Virgen*, on the other. Virginity and fidelity were the highest womanly virtues; Malinche, therefore, was used as an example of a woman who deviated from expected female behavior." (John Taylor)

Assuming the role of Malinche, Rosario went back to the roots in order to understand who she is. But the process has not ended. She has to learn how to cope with her situation of being 'in-between'. As Jean Wyatt says:

"Rosario rejects Guadalupe, re-examines her, embraces her, and finally reconstructs her as a figure that she can understand, live with, and use as a model. To revise the traditional icons is to empower oneself." (Wyatt in Messinger Cypess, 2000: 132).

And since she turned to her Aztec ancestors in order to analyze her position in the community, she will do the same thing to understand the Virgin. This is why she can hardly accept the Virgin Mary without any elements of her own ancient culture; Rosario is a hybrid and the monolithic univocal image of the Virgin will not fully satisfy her needs.

"I wanted you bare-breasted, snakes in your hands. I wanted you leaping and somersaulting the back of bulls. I wanted you swallowing raw hearts and rattling volcanic ash. I wasn't going to be my mother or my grandma. All that self-sacrifice, all that silent suffering. Hell no. not here. Not me." (Cisneros, 1991: 127)

At this point Sandra Cisneros introduces another mythological figure, that of the Virgin of Guadalupe who appeared as a vision to a newly christianized Aztec, Juan Diego, speaking Nahuatl, and asking for a church on Tepeyac hill, the place where a temple of Tonantzin used to be before it has been destroyed. The syncretism Virgin of Guadalupe – Tonantzin is quite obvious. And it is only through the understanding of these two different symbols that Rosario will understand how to be her mother's daughter and her ancestor's follower:

"I don't know how it all fell in place. How I understood who you are. No longer Mary the mild, but our mother Tonantzin. Your church at Tepeyac built on the site of her temple. Sacred ground no matter whose goddess claims it. [...] When I learned your real name is Coatlxopeuh, She Who Has Dominion over Serpents, when I recognized you as Tonantzin, and learned your names are Teteoinnan, Toci, Coatlicue [...] when I could see you as Nuestra Senora de la Soledad, Nuestra Senora de los Remedios, Nuestra Senora del Perpetuo Socorro, [...] Our Lady of Sorrows, I wasn't ashamed, then, to be my mother's daughter, my grandmother's granddaughter, my ancestor's child." (128)

There are some traces of a similar religious syncretism in the first part of the short story too. We have some letters addressed to "Cristo Negro de Esquipulas", "Miraculous Black Christ of Esquipulas" or even to "Sevan African Powers."

Sandra Cisneros reprocesses and reinterprets La Malinche's betrayal. The action of the historical Malinche is transformed and escapes the literal interpretation, that of national treason. It gains new and broader valences that might apply to any culture, it is the refusal of a woman to abide by the traditionalist patriarchal rules.

The other short story we are investigating, *Woman Hollering Creek*, bears strong essential similarities to the previous one. It also deals with the challenging of the patriarchal rule, but in a different way. The tone is more tragic than apologetic and the mythological figure used here is of a more tragic nature. *Woman Hollering Creek* describes the hardships of Cleófilas's life as a married woman. She and her husband have come from Mexico to the United States and she has the experience of the misfit. She cannot adapt to the new location, which proves to be less liberating for the Mexican woman than Mexico, "because the towns here are built so that you have to depend on husbands. Or you stay home." (51). Even worse, she cannot adapt to the condition of a beaten wife.

The thing that most preoccupies her is the name of the *arroyo*, the small rivulet, that runs behind her house, Woman Hollering Creek. She keeps on asking why was the lovely creek given such a funny name, but no one knows, nor cares. She recurrently asks whether it was pain or anger that made the woman holler. She behaves as if this would have been a major problem and her entire life depended on that, and this turns out to be true eventually. However one day she remembers of La Llorona, and even hears the weeping woman calling for her:

"Is it La Llorona, the weeping woman? La Llorona who drowned her own children. Perhaps La Llorona is the one they named the creek after, she thinks, remembering all the stories she learned as a child.

La Llorona calling to her. She is sure of it. Cleófilas sets the baby's Donald Duck blanket on the grass. Listens. [...]La Llorona" (51)

Cleófilas is not a literal La Llorona. Probably together with the neighbor ladies, Soledad and Dolores who were "too busy remembering the man who had left through either choice or circumstance and would never come back." (47). However, she is still linked to the figure of La Llorona since Sandra Cisneros conceived her as a reversed version of the mythical figure, the complementary part of La Llorona. She is both the abused and the one who leaves. Leaving her husband is an act of rebellion, probably the most unpardonable action a woman could commit within the macho society described in the short story:

"Maximiliano who was said to have killed his wife with an ice-house brawl when she came at him with a mop. I had to shoot, he had said – she was armed. Their laughter outside the kitchen window. Her husband's friends. Manolo, Beto, Efraim, el Perico, Maximiliano. Was Cleófilas just exaggerating as her husband always said? It seemed the newspapers were full of such stories. This woman found on the side of the interstate. This one pushed from a moving car. This one's cadaver, this one unconscious, this one beaten blue. Her ex-husband, her husband, her lover, her father, her brother, her uncle, her friend, her co-worker. Always." (52)

Her rebellion is as well a challenging of the phallogocentric hegemony. By leaving her husband she finds out that the hollering is neither pain, nor anger, but liberation and victory. For her, the hollering was also for Mexico, the homeland, the place she belonged to.

“Can you imagine, when we crossed the *arroyo* she just started yelling like a crazy [...]. Who would've thought? Who would've? Pain or rage perhaps, but not a hoot like the one Felice had just let go. Makes you want to holler like Tarzan, Felice had said.” (56)

The woman who hollers this time is Felice, the driver who helps her run away. Felice is a single independent woman, the kind of Malinche investigated above. She does not depend on a man and owns her own car that she had chosen herself. Felice actually offered Cleófilas an alternative to what Cleófilas represents and also gave her the opportunity of crossing the border to a new way of being a woman. The symbolism of crossing borders and gaining a new identity and consciousness is symptomatic for the assertion of women within the patriarchal society and for women writers within the male dominated literary canon.

Cisneros' new mythos carries more than reinterpretation and redefinition. She gives women the power of primary 'symbolizers' and points out the importance of this cultural heritage in the building up of a Chicano culture and identity and tries to raise that sense of awareness that Chicanos have started fighting for in the 60's. Cisneros is perhaps the most 'visible' Chicana in mainstream literary circles and she is probably one of those who represent best their preoccupations by addressing themes of identity, poverty, gender.

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VOICES FROM BEHIND THE VEIL: SOME PERSPECTIVES ON THE WRITINGS OF INDIAN MUSLIM WOMEN

HARIS QADEER¹

ABSTRACT. *“Voices from behind the Veil: Some Perspectives on the Writings of Indian Muslim Women”*. The paper analyzes the importance of education for Muslim Indian women as well as the evolution of several Indian women writers.

Keywords: education, woman, Muslim, liberalization, voice

REZUMAT. *„Voci din spatele vălului. Câteva perspective despre scrierile femeilor musulmane din India”*. Această lucrare analizează importanța educației pentru femeile musulmane din India, precum și evoluția unor scriitoare indiene.

Keywords: educație, femeie, musulman, liberalizare, voce

Muslims form the largest minority of the biggest democracy of the world. The influence of Islam in India is often traced to the advent of Arab traders to the coasts of southern India in the 7th century. Trade and commerce with Arab traders was one of the many reasons behind cultural amalgamation of Indian ethos with those of Islamic world. However, various other historians credit Muhammad Bin Qasim and his armies, who came to India in 712 CE, for the introduction of the new religion of Islam. In the 14th century the influence of Sufism, which originated in Persia and Central Asia, reached Kashmir. Furthermore with the political control of Delhi Sultanate and the dominance of Mughal rule, a number of people embraced the new ways of life. Islam, as a cultural force, came to India at different periods of time and influenced the manners and morals of Indian community. Mughals (Muslim rulers) ruled India for nearly two centuries and the end of the empire came in 1712 with death of last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar.

Tracing the voice of Muslim women in early social and literary history often becomes challenging because of the rare presence of Muslim women in public life. The ideology of seclusion was prevalent in Muslim elite society. *Purdah* was a distinctive aspect of Muslim women's lives, particularly of Muslim elites but it was totally absent in the houses of the working class. The concept of *Purdah* has various connotations in the Muslim world. It refers to the traditional and

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modest dress code for Muslim women, i.e. they wear loose clothes to hide the contours of their body and cover their head with a headscarf. In the beginning *Purdah* was considered to be the status symbol of elite Muslim women but later it distorted into a marker of feminine ‘respectability’ amongst aristocrats. The houses of Muslims aristocrats were divided into two portions – ‘*Mardana*’ and ‘*Zenana*’. Men lived in the portion called *Mardana*, whereas women were confined to *Zenana* where males’ access was prohibited unless they were family members. The role of perfect women was defined by patriarchy. Those women were considered to be good who remained within the four walls of their house. Women’s duties were limited to the domestic world, i.e. serving family and children. Women’s education was generally restricted to religious knowledge. Indian Muslim girls and boys were educated in *Maktabs* (local primary schools) but there was no provision for higher education for girls. The affluent class often afforded private home-tutors for their girls’ education which was restricted to learning the Quran (the holy book of Muslims), and vernacular languages, such as Persian and Urdu.

The first known writing by a Muslim Woman in India goes back to the period of the Mughals. It was written by Emperor Babur’s daughter Begum Gulbadan. She wrote *Humayun-Namah* in 1587. She is fondly remembered as ‘Princess Rose-Body’ by the English translator, Annette S. Beveridge, who translated the Persian document into English in 1902. Until then, the existence of Gulbadan’s *Humayun-Nama* was little known. Begum Gulbadan was born in 1523 in Kabul, Afghanistan and was brought to India as a child. The Mughals were great admirers of art. They paid much importance to art, architecture and literature. They appointed people to document their own life and reigns. Emperor Akbar’s reign was documented in *Akbar-Nama* written by the Persian scholar Abul Fazl and Emperor Babur’s reign was documented in *Babur-Nama*. Akbar wanted the reign of his father, Humayun, to leave written records. He assigned this task to his aunt Gulbadan Begum. He invited her to write whatever she remembered about her brother’s life. Gulbadan Begum accepted the challenge and wrote a text titled *Ahwal Humayun Padshah Jamah Kardom Gulbadan Begum bint Babur Padshah amma Akbar Padshah*. Later it became famous as *Humayun-Nama*. She writes:

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate!

There had been an order issued, ‘Write down whatever you know of the doings of Firdous-Makani (Babur) and Jannat-Ashyani (Humayun)’. At this time when his Majesty Firdaus-Makani passed from this perishable world to the everlasting home, I, this lowly one, was eight years old, so it may well be that I do not remember much. However in obedience to the royal command, I set down whatever there is that I have heard and remember (Begum, 83).

Memories and recollection became the source of writing. She had not used highly flowery language. Written in simple Persian, the style of *Humayun-Nama* is based on *Babur-Nama*. It is a simple setting down of what she knew, remembered

or heard. In her work, she appears to be a simple, pious, and cultured woman. Besides giving the details of feasts, works and architecture of Mughal world, Gulbadan Begum also tells about her journey to the Muslim shrine of Mecca. The first part of her text relates about Humayun's rule after her father's death and Humayun's struggle after his defeat. The latter part also deals with life during the Mughal period. The memoir was lost for centuries. The text is the testimony of an elite woman who remained the mute witness and the silent observer of the glory and the magnificence of a world where men ruled and women remained under the confines of their home.

The end of the Mughal rule and the dawn of the British Empire brought various major socio-cultural changes in the lives of Indians. The traditional Indian society faced Western modernization with the advent of colonization. English was introduced as language in India. The British policy of introducing English in India was underlined in Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay's 'Minute on Indian Education' (1835). Macaulay's Minute formed the basis of the English Education Act of 1835, proposed by the Governor-General William Bentinck. English became the medium of instruction in Indian education, it replaced Persian as the official language at courts, in administration, and diplomacy. Only those who had Western education and could speak English were eligible for government employment. According to Macaulay the objective of the British educational policy in India was "to form a class who may be interpreters between us [the British] and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect."²

Although, the primary aim of introducing English was to strengthen the colonial hold over India, this also opened new vistas of thoughts for the educated class. Indian Reformers, such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Sir Syed Ahmed Khan advocated the modernization of English education. The educated class was introduced to a liberal culture which often made them realize the inferiority of some of the native social system. The Native intellectuals raised their voice against social evils, such as the *sati* (the Hindu practice of burning the wife on the funeral pyre of her husband) and *jauhar* (women killed themselves in order to save their honour). In earlier Indian society women's roles were defined by patriarchy. Indian women had access only to domestic manuals such as Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi's *Bishisti Zewar* (The Ornaments of Paradise) and Uma Debi's *Balika Jivana* (Life of Girls) which defined their role inside their homes. After the imposition of the British rule, secular English manuals based on British domestic manuals, such as G. Oram's *The Book of Domestic Duties* and Emma Drake's *What a Young Wife Ought to Know*, appeared on the Indian market. The position and status of women in society was also questioned by the educated Indian. Some women began to appear in public sphere. They came out of their cocooned life.

² "Minutes by Hon'ble T.B Macaulay, dated the 2nd February 1835". *Project South Asia* 20th October 2010. Web. Retrieved from <http://www.mssu.edu/projectsouthasia/history/primarydocs/education/Macaulay001.htm>

Bengal was the first province in India confronted with Western modernity. The elite class of Bengali Hindus supported modernity and English education. As women were educated, they began to feel an increase urge to voice their feelings. The Muslim-elite also joined their Hindu counterparts and encouraged women's education and emancipation. Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain was one of them. She was a political activist, an educator of Muslim Bengalis in early twentieth century. She was one of the earliest women writers of Indian subcontinent. She wrote in Bengali and English. In her work she emphasizes the role of education and intellectual freedom.

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain was born at Pairaband, Rangpur district (now a part of Bangladesh), in 1880. She was from a conservative Muslim family where women observed purdah and were secluded to *zenana*. She learned Urdu and Arabic from a private tutor at home and her elder brother taught her English. At the age of sixteen she was married to Khan Bahadur Syed Sakhawat Hussain who was a magistrate in Bhagalpur (Bihar, India). Khan Bahadur was a progressive and liberal man who had been to England for higher education. He also encouraged her wife to write and read Indian or foreign literary works. Rokeya improved her command of English in the company of other formally educated elite class ladies.

In *Sultana's Dream*, she envisioned the change of conventional gender roles and she imagined a Ladyland where women had full control of every sphere of life. Tharu thinks that *Sultana's Dream* is "probably the first such work in Indian literature"³. In *Sultana's Dream*, Rokeya presents 'Ladyland' as a utopian society where the manners and morals of contemporary society were changed. She creates a matriarchal society where women govern and men follow women. Rokeya's imagination of such social structures is in direct contrast with the domestic seclusion of women of her time where females were confined to '*zenana*'. In her fictional world women are liberated and men are cabined, crippled and confined inside '*mardana*' a term she uses as a direct opposite to the social norms of female seclusion. In Ladyland, men lost their position as they believed in physical strength rather than intellectual abilities. When a neighbouring country attacks them, they are unable to defend themselves and the Queen has to give them shelter and protection:

...the Queen called upon all the men to retire into zenanas for the sake of honour and liberty. Wounded and tired as they were, they took the order for a boon! They bowed low and entered the zenanas without uttering a single word of protest. (Hossain, 10)

Rokeya not only presents men as tired and helpless creatures but she also presents women protecting them. In Oriental societies the task of saving the 'honour' of women is on men but in her fictional world Rokeya inverts all the norms of contemporary society. Rokeya reveals the masculine hypocrisy that men

³ Tharu, S & Lalita K. (ed.) 'Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain'. *Women Writing in India*, vol I. New Delhi: Oxford India, 1993. p.342. Print

perform out-of-door work and their pretence that they belong to the world of work. She brings forward the emptiness of such masculine claims. In the story Sara tells Sultana:

...they [men] do not. They dawdle in she away their time in smoking. Some smoke two or three choroots [sic] during the office time. They talk much about their work, but do little. Suppose one cheroot takes half an hour to burn off, and a man smokes twelve choroot daily, then you see, he wastes six hours everyday in sheer smoking. (Hossain, 15)

The literary technique of ‘dream’ provided an opportunity to transcend the grim realities of the contemporary society which was hostile to female psyche. In her analysis of *Sultana’s Dream*, Seemin Hasan comments:

Dream sequences, shadowy and associative memory, futuristic visions are interwoven in Rokeya’s story. The dream mode is used as a powerful tool to expand the boundaries of human thought. Sultana, the protagonist, dreams of an ideal world, Ladyland, where the lost matriarchal society is regained. The word ‘Sultana’ refers to the wife of ‘Sultan’ or ruler. The name of the protagonist serves as an ironic contrast to the scientist Queen of Ladyland who is independent of any male support. Ladyland is a utopian space since it represents an ideal feminist space. *Sultana’s Dream* employs utopia to inspire those women who suffers within patriarchal societies. Ladyland represents the liberating prospects of women, particularly Rokeya herself.⁴

Recognizing the hostility of contemporary society towards female education, she wanted to bring about changes in people’s attitude towards female education. She gave importance to women’s education as she believed that women’s liberation is impossible without the educational empowerment of women. She tries to debunk the social myth about female intellectual inferiority. One such myth referred to the smaller size of women’s brain. Women were considered intellectually subordinate because of the size of their brain. Rokeya takes up the issue in *Sultana’s Dream*. She asserts that the size has nothing to do with the intellectual capabilities. After admitting the bigger size of man’s brain she makes her character speak, “Yes, but what of that? An elephant also has got a bigger and heavier brain than a man has. Yet a man can enchain elephants and employ them, according to their own wishes” (Hossain, 9). One of the causes of social backwardness of Indian women was the lack of modern education and opportunities. This seems to be reason behind her portrayal of educated Sister Sara in her utopian society of LadyLand.

She dealt with the same issue in *Padmarag*, where she presents a perfect system of female education. In fact, she presents education as the possible remedy for the plight of women. Suliaman, the older brother of the main protagonist, Zaynab, says,

⁴ Hasan Seemin. “Feminism and Feminist Utopia in Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain’s *Sultana’s Dream*”. *Behind the Veil: Representation of Muslim Women in Indian Writings in English 1950-2000*. Ed. A.R Kidwai. New Delhi: APH Publication Corporation, 2007. p. 91. Print

‘You be prepared for life-struggle. I will make you ready for that and enrich you with proper education so that you will not have to submit yourself in marriage to any depraved man for provision’ (Hossain, 35). Rokeya depicts the marginalized status of women in society through the characters Zaynab, Saudamini and Helen. The two characters are victims of Indian society whereas Helen is the victim of English oppression. Rokeya seems to be portraying the universal plight of the suppressed women. Manners and modes may differ in different societies but women’s subordinate position is same everywhere. With the portrayal of the bold character of Zaynab who rejects the patriarchal demand of treating women as ‘earthen dolls’, she shows that marriage is not only the ultimate goal of a woman’s life and domestic duties are not her final destination. Instead of sacrificing her life on the altar of marriage, she moves ahead and devotes herself to the service of humanity. Her journey from her homelessness to her refuge in Mrs. Sen’s Tarani Bhaban (Tarani Compound) symbolizes her emancipation from the suppressive patriarchal order. She creates an identity for herself. Rokeya also depicts the colonial exploitation through an episode about a colonial indigo plantation and the confiscation of land by the colonizers.

The most remarkable thing about Rokeya is that while talking about a futuristic vision of modernization of contemporary society, she remained true to her religion and culture. Perhaps she understood the true spirit of her religion, Islam. She herself observed *hijab/purdah* (veil) but she never let her *purdah* come in her way. She understood that *purdah* was part of the modest Islamic dress code but seclusion was not an Islamic way. For the Western imagination, *hijab/purdah* might be an emblem of female oppression and a *hijab* clad woman might be an epitome of the repressive Islamic tradition but Rokeya’s perception of the traditional Islamic dress code is in no way similar to those of the West. In one of her essays ‘*Unnatir Pathe*’ (On the way to progress), she criticizes Muslim women who were abandoning *purdah* and adopting Western dresses. Rokeya’s work reveals gender inequality. She emphasizes that men and women are equal and domestic confinement and women’s absence from public life are responsible for women’s secondary status in society.

Indian society was undergoing rapid social changes; women’s issues were gaining impetus. In 1917, a delegation of Women’s Indian Association (WIA) consisting of fourteen women, such as Sarojni Naidu, Annie Besant, Begum Hasrat Mohani and others met Edwin Montague, the Secretary of State. They presented a memorandum about women’s enfranchisement. In Aligarh, Shiekh Abdullah and Begum Abdullah were trying hard to found a residential college for girls. The elite class women supported the noble cause of female education. Begum Sultan Jahan, the Royal Begum of Bhopal, was involved in the issue of female education among Indian Muslims. She came all the way from Bhopal to Aligarh to inaugurate Women’s College at Aligarh. It is said that she used to encourage educated girls by giving gold bangles. Women started coming out of the four walls of their houses.

The sense of loss, the awareness of injustice, the resentment of patriarchy – all became subject of the writings by Indian women. In the 1940s, the few Muslim women writers described the quiet lives of women behind the four-walls of their houses. Iqbal-un-nisa's *Purdah and Polygamy in an Indian Muslim Household* (1945) reveals the life of Muslim women in seclusion and confinement. In the novel *Zohra* (1951), Zeenuth Futehally tackles the theme of suppression and marginalization through her protagonist, a Muslim girl Zohra

Attia Hosain, another Muslim novelist, records the marginalized existence of woman in society. Attia Hosain was born in 1913. She grew up in an elite Kidwai family, in Gadia, Barabanki, near Lucknow. Her collection of short stories *Phoenix Fled* was published in 1953. Another one of her publications was *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, which came out in 1961. Like Rokeya, Attia was also born and brought up in a colonized conservative society but she had advantage of receiving English education. She studied at La Martiniere School and Isabella Thoburn College in Lucknow, and later graduated from University of Lucknow. After graduation she married Ali Bahadur Habibullah, son of Mohammad Habibullah, former Vice Chancellor of the University of Lucknow. She moved to Britain in 1946 when her husband was appointed in the Indian High Commission. In England she worked for the Urdu section of BBC London.

Sunlight on a Broken Column is a famous partition novel set in the 1930's. The novel presents the trauma of Indian partition. The novel is semi-autobiographical and it covers a span of twenty years in the life of orphan Laila who belonged to a family of Muslim *Taluqdars* (landowners). In these twenty years the life of Laila changes. From a young girl of fifteen she turns into a widowed mother of a girl of the same age. The novel focuses on the conflict between tradition and modernism. Attia presents Laila as a girl who is conscious of the political changes of her contemporary time. Through her, Attia represents problems of the Muslim who chose to stay in India.

Attia shows that women were denied participation in the public sphere. The rules for women were designed by patriarchy. The important of modesty for women was stressed by the *purdah* and the *zenana*. Most women characters in *Sunlight on Broken Column* are treated as meager characters that need constant protection. The pathetic condition of conservative Indian families is presented by the character of Zahra (cousin of Laila). The former is prepared all her life only for marriage and the requirements of young men who would marry her:

She has read Quran, she knows her religious duties; she can sew and cook, and at the Muslim school she learned a little English, which is what young men want now (Abid, 35).

Laila emerges as a rebellious character. She falls in love with Ameer, a commoner, and marries him. On her quest for individual identity and personal

satisfaction, Laila leaves her home. She is considered a ‘defiant’ and ‘disobedient’ woman who has no concern for the dignity of family. Through Laila’s protest against patriarchy, Attia rejects the repressive gender norms of society. She understands the importance of education. She does not give up her habit of reading even after many persuasions. She even faces strong opposition against her interest in education. In the very first part of the novel *Hakimun Bua*, her domestic help, advises her:

Your books will eat you. They will dim the light of your lovely eyes...and then who will marry you, owl-eyed, peering through glasses? Why are you not like Zahra, your father’s – God rest his soul – own sister’s, yet so different from you? Pull your head out of your books and look at the world (Abid, 10).

Throughout the novel, Laila remains a mute witness to the historical and social changes of her contemporary time. Attia Hosain does not merely present a contemporary upheaval, but she also tries to depict Laila as an individual woman. She ‘leads a cocooned life. She exists only on margin, watching silently and passively all that happens to and around her’ (Abid, 10). In her analyses of the silence and the plight of Laila in *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, A.R Kidwai writes:

Such a description of Muslim women has been a part of the history of literary Orientalism. The stereotype is of a hapless, helpless Muslim women reeling under patriarchal oppression, husband’s tyranny, gender-related violence and exploitation and subjugation in the name of religion and family and social norms.⁵

Sunlight on a Broken Column cannot be merely regarded as a novel of women’s plight. Although Attia devotes most of the novel to the pain and suffering experienced by Laila as a subjugated woman in a conservative society, the novel is also a social commentary which records the cataclysmic period of Indian partition. Set in the waning period of British colonization, the novel deals with the issues of Indian freedom movements, political upheavals and polarization of Hindu-Muslim community.

The problem of writings in English is that they have a limited circle of readers in India. Before independence (1947) these writings were just limited to an elite class. The writers who wanted to reach a larger number of readers used vernacular languages. Among Indian Muslims, Urdu and its varieties becomes an appropriate linguistic channel. Although Muslim women writers, such as Rasheed Jahan, Ismat Chughtai, Siddiqia Begum Sehvari, wrote primarily in Urdu, their works in translation are easily available. Qurratulain Hyder and Zahida Zaidi wrote in Urdu and translated their own work into English.

Rasheed Jahan came into literary limelight after the publication of her famous short story ‘*Dilli ki Sair*’ (A Pleasure Trip to Delhi) and her play *Parde ke*

⁵ Kidwai, A.R. “Death of a Beautiful Women” Qurratulain Hyder on Attia Hosain”. *Journal of Faculty of Arts*, vol. 3, Nos.1-2. (2004), p. 61. Print

Peeche (Behind the Veil) in the anthology *Angare* (1931) written in Urdu. She is often remembered as a precursor of a new age in women authored Urdu literature.

Rasheed Jahan was born in Aligarh. Her father Sheikh Abdullah, fondly remembered as ‘Papa Mian’, was the founder of Women’s College at Aligarh Muslim University, India. Although born in Muslim family, she was influenced by Marxist ideologies and she worked for communist parties. Rasheed Jahan was a trained gynecologist but she had a knack for writing. Her collection *Aurat aur Dusre Afsane wa Drame (Women and Other Stories and Plays)* was published in Lahore, Pakistan, in 1937. She wrote and directed plays including the adaptation of works of Anton Chekhov, Munshi Premchand, and James Joyce. Rasheed Jahan is mostly interested in the plight of women and what they can do to shatter the chains of patriarchy and social tyranny.

She was also a prominent voice of the Progressive Writers’ Association (formally inaugurated in 1936 at a seminar in Lucknow). Many critics credit the publication of *Angare (Live Coals)* as the foundation event of the association. This controversial anthology contained some ten short stories written in Urdu language by four writers: Sajjad Zaheer (the editor), Ahmed Ali, Mahmuduzzafar, and Rasheed Jahan, the only woman in this group. All these four writers belonged to elite Muslim families. Sajjad Zaheer and Ahmed Ali were educated in England and were under the influence of various European literary movements. Mahmuduzzafar and Rasheed Jahan belonged to the educated class, later being trained as a doctor at the Lady Hardinge Medical College, Delhi.

The anthology mentioned above received a scathing response from the community and the authors were blamed for having intoxicated English culture in the subcontinent. As a response, the British government banned the publication of the anthology but the authors never regretted their creative endeavour. Mahamuduzzafar, one of the authors, wrote a public letter:

The authors of this book do not wish to make any apology for it. They leave it to float or sink of itself....They have chosen the particular field of Islam not because they bear it any ‘special’ malice, but because being born into that particular society, they felt themselves better qualified to speak for that alone. They were more sure of their ground there.⁶

The short story *A Pleasure Trip to Delhi (Dilli Ki Sair)* is written as a flashback. It is a story of Mallika Begum who becomes the first women from her city to go to Delhi to see the sights. After returning from Delhi, she invites other women to listen to her stories about Delhi. At the station, her husband meets an old friend and goes off, leaving her alone. Mallika Begum describes her dreadful experiences at the Delhi station. Covered with burqa (the traditional long veil), she had to face loafers at the station. *The Reticent Maiden (Bezubaan)* is the story of

⁶ Khalid Alvi (ed). *Angare*, Educational Publishing House, Delhi, 1995. Print

Hamid Hasan and his wife Ahmadi Begum who are unable to adapt to the changing times. Ahmadi Begum had broken off her sons' engagement because the girl had received English education and she wanted "to bring home a daughter-in-law, not an English Lady" (Abid, 24). Ahmadi Begum and Hamid Hasan had brought up their daughter in a very protective manner. They did not give her proper education. Even their close relatives had not seen their daughter, Siddiqia Begum. Their daughter is helpless and fed up with the monotony of life and wishes to get married but the parents are unable to find a match for her. The contrast between the spinster Razia Begum to the widowed Zakia Khatoon shows the hypocrisy of the conservative society:

Razia Begum was a sixty years old spinster, but was still unsure of herself. In certain places, young girls, married or unmarried, began gossiping when they saw her. She too was very conscious of this inferiority, and avoided going out as much as possible; if she ever did, she sat where she would not be noticed. Then there was her real parental aunt, Zakia Khatoon, who had been widowed just a month after her marriage. She went everywhere confidently, and spoke out bluntly. No doubt, she was unfortunate, but she had no hang ups (Abid, 21).

Dr. Attia Abid, who translated Rasheed Jahan's short stories and plays into English from Urdu, thinks that "being a medical doctor, Rasheed Jahan could easily talk about the hazards of unplanned pregnancies, birth control, venereal diseases" (Abid, xviii). The story *Asif Jehan's Daughter-in-Law* (*Asif Jehan ki Bahu*) presents the austere conditions of child birth at home at the hands of the traditional midwife. The story *Iftari* (meals taken by Muslim at the time of sunset during the fasting-month of Ramdhan) portrays the gap between the haves and the have-nots. Raseed Jahan wrote on diverse topics and themes. She often thought that "women deserved more from life than being mere child bearing machines for the pleasure of men" (Abid, iv). It won't be an exaggeration to say that she was a woman ahead of her time.

Other notable women writers who were under the influence of PWA and Rasheed Jahan are Razia Sajjad Zaheer (Wife of Sajjad Zaheer) and Siddiqia Begum Sehvari. Razia Sajjad Zaheer (1917-1979) was a novelist, essayist, and translator. She has translated over forty works into Urdu language. Her novels *Kaante* (*Thorns*) and *Suman* were published in 1954 and 1963, respectively. She has published the letters Sajjad Zaheer under the title *Nuqush-e-Zindan* (*Impressions from Prison*). In her writings, she questioned the social and cultural restrictions imposed upon women. Siddiqia begum Sehvari (b. 1925) was also associated with PWA. She was influenced to Marxist ideologies and the PWA through Rasheed Jahan. She has five collections of short stories to her credit. *Hichkiyan* (*Hiccups*) was published in 1944; *Palkon Mein Ansu* (*Tears in Eyelashes*) was published in 1947. Her work gives voice to the downtrodden and the haves not. Susie Tharu and K Lalita comment on the writing style of these writers.

“The focus of narratives remains the middle class protagonist and her moral awakening to social responsibility and therefore also citizenship”⁷.

The iconoclastic personality of Rasheed Jahan also influenced Ismat Chughati (1915 – 1991). The latter was born into a middle class family in Badayun, Uttar Pradesh, India. She is known as one of the four masters of modern Urdu short story and as doughty spirit of Urdu fiction. Her work includes fictions, such as *Ziddi* (Stuborn), *Tehri Lakeer* (Crooked Lines), *Ek Katra-e-Khoon* (A Drop of Blood), and *Dil ki Duniya* (The World of the Heart) and collections of short stories, such as *Kaliyaan* (Buds), *Ek Baat* (One Word), *Do Hath* (Two Hands), *Thori si Pagal* (A Little Crazy). Ismat Chughtai wrote twelve scripts for Hindi cinema in partnership with her husband.

The writings of Dostoyevsky, Somerset Maugham, O Henry and Chekov had great impact on Ismat. Her first story *Fasadi* (Troublemaker) brought her literary acclaim. In 1936, she attended the first meeting of the Progressive Writers’ Association (PWA). Here she came in contact with Rasheed Jahan, the writer and one of the members of Progressive Writers’ Association. Ismat was deeply impressed by Rasheed Jahan. She even modeled her characters on Rasheed Jahan. She became a member of the PWA and was influenced by Marxist ideologies. The canvas of Ismat’s story is crowded with the people from the conservative middle class and from the Indian-Muslim family. Themes and characters are taken from the ordinary world of North Indian cities. Her fiction deals with a culture which is full of relatives – uncles, aunts, cousins, mother-in-laws, grandchildren, and servants. Amidst them, she explores and unpacks the issues related to family life and the question of sexuality in middle class families. She treated these themes with candid sensitivity. The themes were diverse and bold and she was realistic in the portrayal of human plights and predicaments. Her focus is not merely on the socio-cultural structure of society but she also dwells deep upon the dark crevices of human psyche. She believed that ‘experiences can never be obscene if they are based on authentic realities of life’ (Asaduddin, XI). Ismat has extensively explored the theme of lesbianism in one of her controversial short story ‘*Lihaaf*’ (The Quilt).

It is story of a beautiful aristocratic wife of a wealthy *nawab* (Landlord). Unable to find time and love from her husband, she finds sexual satisfaction and psychological comfort in the company of her maid servant. The story is narrated by a nine-year old girl. The use of a child narrator helped Ismat to treat the theme with great freedom. The child-narrator is not judgmental; instead she records thing as she saw them:

In the dark Begum Jaan’s quilt was once again swaying like an elephant. ‘Allah! Ah!...’ I moaned in a feeble voice. The elephant inside the quilt heaved up and then sat down. I was mute. The elephant started sway again. I was scared stiff. But

⁷ Tharu, S & Lalita K. (ed.) *Women Writing in India*, vol II, New Delhi: Oxford India, 1993 p.82. Print

I resolved to switch on the light that night, come what may. The elephant started shaking once again, and it seemed as though it was trying to squat. There was sound of someone smacking her lips, as though savouring a tasty pickle...Once again the quilt started swinging. I tried to lie still but the quilt began to assume such grotesque shapes that I was shaken. It seemed as though a large frog was inflating itself noisily and was about to leap on me. (Asaduddin, 22)

The publication of *Lihaaf* brought severe criticism from the people and government. The writer was charged by the British government (India was under British rule) for obscenity. She narrates this traumatic incident in her autobiographical piece '*In the Name of those Married Women...*'

Besides these letters, there were articles published in newspapers and debates in literary and cultural gatherings. Only a hard-hearted person like me could put up with them. I never retaliated, nor did I refuse to admit my mistake. I was aware of my fault...I was against my own self...None of my friends or Shahid's friends attached much importance to it. (Asaduddin, 224)

Much of Ismat Chughtai's fiction focuses on women's issues and concerns. They show a profound understanding of the socio-cultural status of women in contemporary Muslim society. The male characters remain at the boundaries of her creative imagination. In the story *Ghunghat* (Veil), the problem of the protagonist is her devotion to the institution of marriage. In stories such as *Gharwali* (Homemaker) and *Mole* (Til), Ismat Chughtai also deals with characters from the rural world. Her countrywomen are more robust and sensual than their urban counterpart. Lajo in *Homemaker* and Rani in *Mole* exhibit the social reality of the lower strata of the society. They indulge themselves in physical relations with many men without any concern for society. Ismat Chughtai's writings can be read as a cultural narrative. M. Asaduddin comments on the countrywomen in Ismat Chughtai's writings: 'the construction of female sexuality in these stories follows a uniform pattern and underscores Chughtai's own perception of the issue: sexual attraction and raw sensuality is vested in women of lower strata of society, while shame, silence, and erasure of sexuality is the lot of middle-class 'respectable' women'. (Asaduddin, xi).

Another Muslim author of prominence in Indian literary history is Qurratulain Hyder (1928-2007). Born in Aligarh, she was an Urdu novelist, journalist and academician. After graduating from Isabella Thoburn College, Lucknow, she migrated to Pakistan. Then she lived in England for a while before returning to India. She wrote twelve novels and novellas and four collections of short stories. She started writing short stories at a very young age and her very first short story was published in a reputed journal *Humayun* in Lahore (now in Pakistan).

Hyder was from an educated Muslim family of writers. She traces her genealogy in the preface to her collection of short stories *The Sound of Falling Leaves*: 'My ancestors, including some ladies, wrote poetry in Persian and Urdu...The

younger generation of writers who rose to prominence included my great-aunt Akbari Begum (d. 1929) and my parents Sajjad Hyder Yildirim (1880-1943) and Nazar Sajjad Hyder (1890-1967)'(Hyder, vi).

Hyder's great-aunt, Akbari Begum, was one of the forerunners of Urdu fiction. Hyder wrote her first novel in 1898 in which she presented the story of a Nawabzadi (daughter of a *nawab*/lord) of Lucknow. The Nawabzadi is presented as an emancipated woman who studied chemistry and mathematics at home. In her magnum opus *Goodar Ka Lal* (A Gem in Rags) which was published in 1908, she portrays life of a modern Muslim girl Surraiya, who is educated in Lahore Medical College. She shuns traditionalism and discards the *purdah*.

Hyder's mother, Nazar Sajjad Hyder, is known for her novel *Jaanbaaz* (1921). The novel is remembered for its anti-colonial sentiments. Her heroine Zubeida sets fire to English looms and brings home a *karga* (hand spinning wheel). She sets up a small factory to weave towels. In 1920, Gandhi started the Non-cooperation movement against British government. Many Indians came under the influence of the anti-colonial movement and returned their British honours, resigned from government services, withdrew their children from British schools and began to boycott British goods. Nazar Sajjad Hyder herself became a member of the movement and boycotted British products. As an active participant and supporter of the movement, she wore *Khadi* (Hand spun cotton fabric).

Qurratulain Hyder inherited the knack for writing from her family. Her collection *Patjhar ki Awaaz* (The Sound of Falling Leaves) was awarded the Sahitya Academy Award, in 1968. Some of the stories in the collection present the perplexity and the stupefaction of entire generation of young Indians in the twilight of British Empire and partition of India. Much of her writings stem from her photographic memories, nostalgia, total-recall of past events and her investigation of her own cultural roots. Her novel *Aag ka Dariya* (River of Fire) presents the history of India and Pakistan. In *Fireflies in the Mist* (1994) unfolds the chronicle of the last battles the British administration fought in Bengal. Women's issues were not Hyder's unique preoccupation. Born in an educated elite class where women were given liberty, as a child, she never took women's issues seriously. She writes:

...thing which I had taken for granted in my childhood was, of course, women's progress. My first cousins had studied in convent schools in the hills in 1920's and the family had produced a crop of women graduates long before independence. An aunt had shot tiger. Mother's writer friend, Hijab Imtiaz Ali, nee Ismail, had become an aviator in 1936. And with so much going on in the family and within the social circle, it was quite natural that I grew up, I began to write it all down in an impressionistic, so-called 'stream of consciousness' manner. (Hyder, xiii)

The title of her novel *Agle Janam Mohe Bitia Na Kijo* can be translated as 'Don't Make Me a Daughter in the Next Birth' but for some reasons the translator changed the title as 'Women's Life'. In *Women's Life* and *Sita Haran* (Sita Betrayed),

Hyder deals with the suppression of women in a male-dominated society. In *Agle Janam Mohe Bitia Na Kijio*, Hyder shows the struggle of two orphan sisters: Rushke Qamar and handicapped Jamilan. They are treated merely as commodities in a men's world. Their poverty forces them to become victims of men who treat them as object of flesh. They are 'multiple-colonized' subalterns of the society who are on a search of a better future. Agha Farhad exploits them with false promises of making them radio singers. They fall prey to Vurma, a womanizer, who runs The Song Bird Club. In search of a better future, Rushke Qamar becomes victim of the carnal desires of Verma who pretends to love her. Later he marries 'a respectable girl'. Verma also betrays Sadaf, another poor woman, who was living with him as his 'keep'. Verma exploited Sadaf on the pretext of making her singer. Whenever Sadaf expressed her doubts over their relationship, Verma would get annoyed:

Look here Sadaf don't irritate me. Go and sleep. Have you forgotten what you were? Look how I have changed your destiny. I have turned you into a famous artist. Be satisfied and do not dream impossible dreams. I transformed an obscure street singer into Sadaf Ara Begum. (Hyder, 23)

Then Rushke Qamar becomes pregnant by an Iranian, Agha Hamdani, who deserts her. Rushke gives birth to a girl-child Maah Para. In search of Agha Hamdani, Rushke Qamar goes to Karachi, Pakistan. Jamilan manages to earn her bread and butter by doing *chikan* work (a kind of embroidery famous in Northern India). In Karachi, Rushke Qamar goes through a series of unfortunate incidents including the murder of her daughter who had begun a modeling career. Rushke Qamar returns back to India and finds that Jamilan had passed away. She is left alone in the world to fend for herself. She is too old to sing. Thus, she takes up the work of *chikan*. Through the portrayal of her women characters – Rushke Qamar, Jamilan, Sadaf, Maah Para, Hyder brings forth the insecurity of women in a rigid male dominated society. Amidst tragedies and misfortunes, Hyder shows the buried power of women in a patriarchal social system. While Rushke Qamar and Sadaf make few compromises with the male hegemony, Jamilan, who was lame and ill, displays the dignity of his character.

Hyder's *Sita Betrayed* (1960) is a saga of a Hindu refugee from Sindh. Sita Mirchandani's trust and gullibility become the reason for her plight. The title itself has symbolic overtones. In Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Sita is deceived by one Ravana but in Hyder's story contemporary Sita is deceived by many men. Through these delineations Hyder exposes the hypocrisy of society where the filth of human real characters is hidden underneath. Sita comes in contact of many intellectual men who seem to be decent and dignified but when it comes to exploitation, they all prove to be same. On the other hand, Sita involved herself completely in each and every relationship. After her marriage she adapted herself to the life style of Jamil. She started "to drink a lot so that I (she) could keep him company in the evening"

(Hyder, 80). She tries to be a dedicated and loving partner during her stay in Paris where “she would prepare food, iron the clothes, clean the house, and put up Irfan’s slippers by his armchair near the fire place for his return” (Hyder, 80).

In her writings, Hyder paints the picture of contemporary society which has passed from the traditional to the modern. Through the delineations of women characters passing through tough tests, she proves their strength. Hyder has written and self-translated her works for maximum reading accessibility.

Like Hyder, Zahida Zaidi also wrote both in English and Urdu. She is a poet, dramatist, translator, and academician. She taught at Aligarh Muslim University and at the University of Delhi. She has a Master’s degree from the University of Cambridge, U.K. Besides teaching and writing, she also got involved in staging plays which enriched her dramatic vision. She has translated, into Urdu, the plays of Chekov, Pirandello, Sartre and Beckett and poetry of Eugenio Montale, Federico Garcia Lorca and Pablo Neruda. Her collections of poetry in English include *Beyond Words* and *Broken Mirror* which were published in 1979. Her Urdu poetry includes collections such as *Dharti ke Lams* (The Touch of Earth) and *Zarh-e-Hyat* (Life’s Prison) which she was awarded an Urdu Academy award in 1971. She has written a novel *Inquilab ka Ek Din* (A Day of Revolution) and a Drama *Sehrae Aazam* which she self-translated as *Burning Desert*. Zaidi, herself, called *Burning Desert* an ‘anti-war protest drama’. The Gulf War (1991) offered the possibility to express her perception and vision, her feelings of threat, the imminence of lurking danger and disaster. She brings forth the horrific picture of war and its impact on the economic, the sociological, the psychological aspect of life. Zaidi has borrowed few characters from Samuel Beckett’s magnum opus *Waiting for Godot*. In the process of adoption and adaption, these characters retain some of their original characteristics but they undergo transformations, as well. Godo and Didi are introduced from the very first scene of the play. These characters, apart from representing common humanity, function as the chorus of the play, commenting on the action. Along with common men, women and children, they make efforts to stop the war. In the final scene of the drama, Didi speaks, “Listen to me Gogo, we are not going to wait for Godot. There is so much work to be done. Some other actor on another stage can wait for Godot” (Zaidi, 122).

Writing at a time when Indian society was conservative and orthodox, and when women spent their whole life behind the four walls of their home, the Indian Muslim women I have commented upon challenged the manners and morals of their contemporary time. They sternly advocated their self-definition for women. Their works were mostly based on the struggle of women for an individual and respectable identity in an oppressive society.

In the post-independence modern age, under the influence of various feminist movements, the condition of women has certainly changed. The world of Muslim women has not remained untouched. The contemporary writing in English

by Indian Muslim women is not very well established as compared to their other counterparts who have won international literary prizes. In the current literary world, there are few Indian Muslim women writers authoring in English; some of them are in the diasporas, few are educated in foreign universities but, as whole, their writings are still to attract mass attention.

Some of the contemporary women writers belonging to this group are Ameena Meer, Sohila Abdulali, Samina Ali, and Anjum Hasan. These contemporary Muslim women are young writers who have recently entered the literary world and have produced few but promising writings.

Ameena Meer is a multi-cultural personality. She was born of Indian parents in Boston, America, and was educated in Britain. Her novel *Bombay Talkies* (1994) is about a teenager Diaspora Sabah who visits India. The novel explores the world of Indian Hindi cinema 'Bollywood' through the eyes of the protagonist.

Another expatriate novelist Samina Ali published her first novel *Madras on Rainy Days* in 2004. Set in ancient city of Hyderabad, India (where Samina Ali was born), the novel tells the story of a Layla, who is caught in an orthodox and repressive culture where she is forced to marry an unknown man, Sameer. The novel highlights the purdah culture, the disturbed family life, domestic violence, superstitions and the religious violence between the Hindus and the Muslims.

Sohaila Abdulali was born and grew up in Mumbai and educated at Brandeis University and Stanford University. She writes fiction, as well as non-fictions. Her first novel *The Madwoman of Jogare* was published in 1998. Besides the foretelling of monsoon by a madwoman, the novel discusses the issues of urbanization and tribal displacement.

Anjum Hasan is famous as a multi-talented woman. She is a manager, editor, reviewer and newspaper columnist. She is known for her collection of poems *Street on the Hills* and for her novel *Lunatic in My Head* which was published in 2007.

The writings by Muslim women voice the condition of women in relation to their culture and community. They have attempted to dismantle the hegemony of male world. Conscious of the hostility of society, the women characters in their works show the metamorphosis of women psyche from the traditional to the realistic. The society plays a big part in the definition of the role and the responsibilities of woman. These women writers present perspectives which are based on their experiences 'as woman' in Indian society. The style of their writings is mainly inward-looking and soul searching in nature. They investigate and try to identify the entrenched causes of women's marginalization and suppression. They have attempted to dismantle the traditional notion of female inferiority and male superiority.

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SHAPERS OF FEMALE IDENTITY IN ELIZA HAYWOOD'S *FANTOMINA*

CAMELIA TEGLAȘ¹

ABSTRACT. “*Shapers of Female Identity in Eliza Haywood’s Fantomina*”. Eliza Haywood, who shared the literary scene with authors like Defoe, Swift and Pope, was the most prolific female writer of the eighteenth century. A fine observer of humans and human relationships, she wrote frankly about sexuality and provided powerful insights in the complexity of romance and marriage. *Fantomina*, often referred to as "novella" or "short-story" by scholars, follows the story of a heroine who disguises herself as four different women, assuming four different identities to seduce the man she loves. The article analyses the elements that contribute to the development of female identity in Eliza Haywood’s *Fantomina* focussing on concepts such as body, name, female, human interactions.

Keywords: identity, female, body, human relationships

REZUMAT. „*Elemente de identitate feminină în Fantomina de Eliza Haywood*”. Eliza Haywood, cea care a împărțit scena literă cu autori precum Defoe, Swift, sau Pope, a fost cea mai prolifică scriitoare a secolului al optprezecelea. Fin observator al relațiilor umane, a scris deschis despre sexualitate, analizând minuțios iubirea și căsătoria în complexitatea lor. *Fantomina* e o povestire ce urmărește soarta unei eroine care, sub masca a patru femei distincte, asumându-și patru identități diferite, seduce repetat bărbatul pe care-l iubește. Articolul analizează elementele care contribuie la dezvoltarea identității feminine în *Fantomina* de Eliza Haywood, insistând asupra unor concepte precum corp, nume, feminin, relații interumane.

Cuvinte cheie: identitate, feminin, corp, relații interumane

“Reading is universally allowed to be one of the most improving, as well as agreeable Amusements; but then to render it so, one should [...] endeavour to single out such as promise to be most conducive to those Ends. In order to be as little deceiv’d as possible, I, for my own part, love to get as well acquainted as I can with an Author, before I run the risque of losing my Time in perusing his Work” (Eliza Haywood, *The Female Spectator, Chapter 1 The Editor introduces herself... and her “Associates”*)

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Eliza Haywood – some biographical notes

Eliza Haywood, born Fowler (1693 – 25 February 1756) was an English writer, actress and publisher. She shared the literary scene with authors like Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope and was considered the most prolific female writer of the eighteenth century. She wrote and published during her lifetime over seventy works including fiction, drama, poetry, translations, conduct literature and periodicals. Considered a significant figure of the eighteenth century and also an important figure in the history of British women's literature, she also represents one of the important founders of the novel in English.

Her first successful novel *Love in Excess; or The Fatal Inquiry* appeared in 1719 and it was a popular work for more than a decade, being reprinted six times. *Love in Excess* was one of the earliest examples of the romance novel in the history of printed English literature. Haywood continued to write in this genre and in 1724 appeared one of the most intriguing of her writings, *Fantomina*.

Fantomina: Or, Love in a Maze, often referred to as "novella" or "short-story" by scholars, was published in 1724. It follows the story of a heroine "a young Lady of Distinguished Birth, Beauty, Wit, and Spirit" (Haywood, 2), who disguises herself as four different women, assuming four different identities: Fantomina, the prostitute, Celia, the maid, Widow Bloomer, and Lady Incognita, to seduce the man she loves.

To better understand how Eliza Haywood constructs the female identity of her character we will first focus on the definitions of identity, female and feminine.

Identity

When accessing the online *Roget's 21st Century Thesaurus* we may notice that the definition given to *identity* is a "person's individuality" followed by a long list of synonyms such as: character, coherence, selfness, singleness, uniqueness.²

Female and feminine (identity)

Female and *feminine* are "adjectives that describe women and girls or attributes and conduct culturally ascribed to them" and, although they may be used as synonyms, there are certain peculiarities that must be noticed. "*Female*, which is applied to plants and animals as well as to human beings, is a biological or physiological descriptor, classifying individuals on the basis of their potential or actual ability to produce offspring in bisexual reproduction. It contrasts with male in all uses: *her oldest female relative; the female parts of the flower*".³

² "identity." *Roget's 21st Century Thesaurus, Third Edition*. Philip Lief Group 2009. <Thesaurus.com <http://thesaurus.com/browse/identity>>. Accessed on 01 Dec. 2010.

³ "female" *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc. <Dictionary.com <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/female>>. Accessed on 01 Dec. 2010.

Feminine refers essentially to qualities or behaviours deemed by a culture or society to be especially appropriate to or ideally associated with women and girls. In American and Western European culture, these have traditionally included features such as delicacy, gentleness, gracefulness, and patience: *to dance with feminine grace; a feminine sensitivity to moods. Feminine* is also, less frequently, used to refer to physical features: *a lovely feminine figure; small, feminine hands*⁴”.

Which would be then more appropriate to use when talking about a woman's identity? Our view is that *female* includes *feminine* but, as long as *feminine* could be very well attributed to a man's behaviour the term favoured in the approach is *female*.

What gives someone individuality? What makes us unique? How do we manage to identify ourselves and say who we are? How many elements contribute to the development of one's identity? We could mention, as shapers of identity: the name, the body, the mind, the feelings and emotions, the family, the social status and the social class, the historical time. Each concept, in its turn, develops a huge net of connections, relations and interactions and the list could be longer and larger. As large as life itself: identity is who you are.

In the following, we will try to observe how some of the identity shapers mentioned above concur to the construction of identity of Haywood's protagonist.

The name

Names are used to designate someone, identify someone. Names have meanings. *Althea* means *Pure*, *Elisabeth* is *Devoted to God*, *Pamela* means *Made from Honey*, to mention only a few. What does *Fantomina* mean? What's in this name? The author creates a mystery around the identity of her character from the very beginning, informing the readers that she was “a young Lady of Distinguished Birth, Beauty, Wit, and Spirit” (Haywood, 2), born and raised in the countryside, but not giving her a name. It is the character who later introduces herself under four different names that match the four different identities she assumes during the story: *Fantomina*, *Celia*, *Widow Bloomer* and *Incognita*. *Fantomina* suggests a phantom, a ghost, something you cannot touch, or may come from pantomime. *Celia* may be the short form of *Cecilia*, a name of Romanian origin, which means *The Blind One*. *Bloomer* means *Error* and *Incognita*, used as a feminine of *incognito*, means *Disguised*.

The body

The body, this “house of many windows”, as Robert Louis Stevenson calls it, is our external, physical representation, which both we and the others are aware of. Our perception of the body influences and is, in the same time, influenced by the perception

⁴ "feminine" *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc. <[Dictionary.com http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/feminine](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/feminine)>. Accessed on 01 Dec. 2010.

of the others. It tells us how to wear it and take care of it. The representation of the body is reflected also in the clothes, which, according to the historical period and social category one belongs to, dictates a certain dress code which generates a certain way of being addressed. The protagonist of Haywood's story is aware that each identity she assumes requires a different external representation. Consequently, she will carefully choose to dress up, make up, behave, talk or write according to the character she plays. As *Fantomina*, she decides "to dress Herself as near as she could in the Fashion of those Women who make sale of their Favours, and set herself in the Way of being accosted as such a one, having at that Time no other Aim, than the Gratification of an innocent Curiosity" (Haywood, 2). Her looks speak of her status and her intentions, therefore the attitude and behaviour of the others is accordingly: "She had no sooner design'd this Frolick, than she put it in Execution; and muffling her Hoods over her Face, went the next Night into the Gallery-Box, and practising as much as she had observ'd, at that Distance, the Behaviour of that Woman, was not long before she found her Disguise had answer'd the Ends she wore it for: A Crowd of Purchasers of all Degrees and Capacities were in a Moment gather'd about her, each endeavouring to out-bid the other, in offering her a Price for her Embraces" (Haywood, 2).

As *Celia*, she changes her way of talking, imitating the dialect of the area, altering again her looks and behaviour: "The dress she was in, was a round-ear'd Cap, a short Red Petticoat, and a little Jacket of Grey Stuff; all the rest of her Accoutrements were answerable to these, and joined with a broad Country Dialect, a rude unpolish'd Air, which she, having been bred in these Parts, knew very well how to imitate, with her Hair and Eye-brows black'd, made it impossible for her to be known, or taken for any other than what she seem'd" (Haywood, 6).

As *Widow Bloomer* she can belong again to her class, but needs to be more refined and sophisticated: "The Dress she had order'd to be made, was such as Widows wear in their first Mourning, which, together with the most afflicted and penitential Countenance that ever was seen, was no small Alteration to her who us'd to seem all Gaiety. – To add to this, her Hair, which she was accustom'd to wear very loose, both when *Fantomina* or *Celia*, was now ty'd back so straight, and her Pinnars coming so very forward, that there was none of it to be seen. In fine, her Habit and Air were so much chang'd, that she was more difficult to be known in the rude Country Girl, than she was now in the sorrowful Widow" (Haywood, 7). She invents a sorrowful story, of losing the little fortune her husband left behind if she does not arrive to London, to gain the sympathy and consolation of her loved one.

Her discourse is changed. She talks about love as the happiness of mutual affection, of the "unspeakable ecstasy of those who meet with equal Ardency" and, consequently, *Beauplaisir* also changes his discourse, which is accompanied by respect and modesty. "He did not, however, offer, as he had done to *Fantomina* and *Celia*, to urge his Passion directly to her, but by a thousand little softening Artifices, which he well knew how to use, gave her leave to guess he was enamour'd" (Haywood, 8).

Clothing the body may be one form of disguise and of assuming an identity, but the true art stays in the facial expressions, attitude and behaviour one displays. "Besides the Alteration which the Change of Dress made in her, she was so admirably skill'd in the Art of feigning, that she had the Power of putting on almost what Face she pleas'd, and knew so exactly how to form her Behaviour to the Character she represented; [...] She could vary her very Glances, tune her Voice to Accents the most different imaginable from those in which she spoke when she appear'd herself" (Haywood, 8).

The fourth character, Incognita is the most developed of them all. Under the protection of anonymity, she can embody both the young, noble lady, dressed up suitable to her social rank, and the mistress, ready to offer her favours. Breaking all rules, she takes the initiative in establishing a relationship and introduces herself by sending Beauplaisir a "Billet" in which she declares her being "infinite in love" with him, but where she refuses him "the knowledge of her name. "She dress'd herself in as magnificent a Manner, as if she were to be that Night at a Ball at Court. Her fine Shape, and Air, and Neck, appear'd to great Advantage; Beauplaisir was prodigiously charm'd, as well with her Appearance, as with the Manner she entertain'd him" (Haywood, 12). He is not allowed to question her name or see her face, although he hopes "she would not lie in her Mask". To his disappointment, she decides to preserve the mystery.

Human relationships

Besides the genetic, biological and social heritage that the family offers, they educate, form, and shape the individual. Family members and family relations are the first representations and manifestations of our social life and stand, for many, as a permanent social and moral regulator. This is the reason why Eliza Haywood brings on stage *Fantomina's* mother "that Lady who was severely virtuous, did not approve of many Things she had been told of the Conduct of her Daughter" (Haywood, 13). Human relations and interactions influence a lot the development of someone's identity, according to the age, gender, social class, or era. The rebellious spirit of the youth, inclined to adventurous actions must be tamed by the mature nature of the mother. If at the beginning she had "no Body in Town, at that Time, to whom she was oblig'd to be accountable of her Actions, did in every Thing as her Inclinations or Humours render'd most agreeable to her" (Haywood, 2), close to the end "the sudden Arrival of her Mother [...] obliged her to put an immediate stop to the Course of her Whimsical Adventures" (Haywood, 13). The author underlines the corrective and regulatory role of society through the mother/daughter relationships. The presence of her mother coincides with the discovery of the fact that her "amorous Follies" had consequences: "she was with child". She keeps disguising. The clothes - the corset or strait and a great hoop-petticoat - are once more her best allies. Her behaviour is also a mask to help her hide her pregnancy. She was eating little and, ignoring her condition, she was attending balls. The "unexpected" event of giving birth to a child occurs at a

ball. The masquerade arena is the place where she must take off her mask. She is discovered. Clothes, behaviour, masks, all are now useless, for they cannot disguise her anymore. It is her mother's authority and relationships that can now shape the protagonist's identity.

Fantomina decides not to marry Beauplaisir who is told the story of disguise. He continues to visit her, but the mother urges him to refrain from coming, presuming that their meetings would lead to a "Renewing of the Crime". The young lady's reputation is re-established as the mother sends her daughter to a Monastery in France, ending thus an "Intreague, which was full of Variety" (Haywood, 15).

The Author

If in real life one's identity might be shaped by some of the elements previously mentioned, the identity of the fiction character benefits of one more refined artisan who draws and constructs the protagonist's identity: the author. She creates and imagines, narrates, constructs, develops, becomes. She writes. The text is a body that wears clothes, enters stories, or takes a stage and acts. It is a voice that sings or speaks or cries. It is a hand which writes or draws or paints. It is an identity.

Conclusions

Eliza Haywood was, undoubtedly, not only a prolific writer, but a fine observer of humans and human relationships, a writer who created and crafted her stories focusing on the minute construction of the identity of her characters. The names, the clothes, the perceptions of the body, the attitude, the behaviour, the discourse, or the social relationships, all play an important role in the construction of a person's individuality. Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina* proves it utterly.

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AESTHETIC ALTERNATIVES IN THE ROMANIAN LITERARY NEO-MODERNISM. WOMEN WRITERS AND FICTIONAL EVASION

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ABSTRACT. *“Aesthetic Alternatives in the Romanian Literary Neo-Modernism. Women Writers and Fictional Evasion”.* The study analyses, through a close critical reading, the symptomatic alliance between the aesthetic value and the ideologically subversive message of certain narrative fictions written, during the communist regime, by Romanian women writers such as Ana Blandiana and Sânziana Pop. The two novelists constantly develop a detailed aesthetic methodology of alternative writing (a polemical version to “the socialist realism” of the politically engaged literature, submissive to the totalitarian regime), based on “Aesopic discourse” and on various textual and imaginary structures that allow the liberating “fictional evasion”.

Keywords: ideological pressure, Aesopic discourse, subversive literature, women writers, subjectivist fiction, aesthetic methodology.

REZUMAT. *„Alternativă estetică în neomodernismul literar românesc. Scriitoarele și evaziunea ficțională”.* Studiul analizează, printr-un demers critic de tip *close reading*, relația simptomatică dintre valoarea estetică și mesajul ideologic subversiv, în sensul de constituenți ai unor ficțiuni narative elaborate, în timpul regimului comunist, de către scriitoare precum Ana Blandiana și Sânziana Pop. Cele două romaniere practică o detaliată metodologie estetică a scrisului “alternativ”, ca versiune polemică la adresa “realismului socialist”, caracteristic literaturii obediente față de principiile regimului totalitar. Formula “alternativă” a scriitoarelor se bazează pe “discursul esopic”, precum și pe anumite structuri textuale și imaginare menite să permită “evaziunea ficțională” eliberatoare.

Cuvinte cheie: presiune ideologică, discurs esopic, literatură subversivă, scriitoare femei, ficțiune subiectivă, metodologie estetică.

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In the latter half of the previous century, the oppressive communist system in Romania exerted a constant ideological pressure upon the cultural process. Such pressure entailed the development of a particular literary model in this period, which would ever more conspicuously produce what has repeatedly been described as the “Aesopic discourse” in literature. This was to become entrenched as a scriptural modality by the 1970s and 1980s. Readers relished the “Aesopic” flavour of literary texts with covert or explicit delight. In terms of the mass reception of such literature, it had a fundamental compensatory role from the vantage point of a traumatised collective psychology. Literary texts illicitly conveyed, across the terror-ridden borders of Censorship (as an institution of the totalitarian State), a series of whole or partial, obvious or implicit truths. Besides these, various literary techniques and outlooks on art also partook of this “Aesopic” character.

One of the subversive formulas adopted as a literary strategy was the resuscitation of the modernist principle of “art for art’s sake.” Resuscitation here entailed the deployment of aesthetic practices that exclusively upheld art’s autonomous value, deliberately ignoring any extra-aesthetic commandments imposed from outside the textual space. It is, therefore, not surprising that surrealism and oneirism ranked, from a certain historical moment onwards, amongst the recrudescing poetic and narrative models. Such recrudescence was symptomatic for a particular (well-defined) field of autochthonous literary creation. It is also not surprising that certain productions in this area would only see the light of print after the changing of the political regime and that certain writers were forced to embark on exile.

Such a “case” of a book whose publication would not have been allowed before 1989 is Ana Blandiana’s novel *The Drawer of Applause*, published in 1992.² *The Drawer of Applause* clearly represents one of the texts that belong to the famous and much awaited (in 1990) “drawer literature” that was to come to light at the beginning of the 1990s. Almost exclusively politically insurgent, to the detriment of its own literariness, such literature was disappointing especially given the uncertain and purely resentful quality of its writing. Ana Blandiana’s book is, however, a happy exception to such an aesthetically marred area.³ Even after a decade and a half of “attrition,” *The Drawer of Applause* remains successful from the vantage point of contemporary critical taste, which tends to be more incisive about and less empathetic towards works that were initially subjected to analysis in

² The novel was re-edited in 2002 and in 2004.

³ In his *Critical History of Romanian Literature* (Pitești: Paralela 45, 2008), Nicolae Manolescu erroneously dismisses the novel in a single brief sentence at the end of his otherwise enthusiastic article devoted to Ana Blandiana. The critic indicts the novel for featuring aestheticist excess; on page 1052 he says, “it is too literary and, at times, abstruse, given its subject-matter.” Manolescu’s choice of qualifiers betrays an inaccurate or, in any case, hasty reading of the novel’s textualist techniques. By 1983, the year that Blandiana began drafting the novel, these techniques no longer represented an experimentalist novelty, having already been theorised upon as literary instruments of an entire aesthetic generation. The commentator, moreover, ignores exactly the dimension of parabolic subversion that such instruments assisted extremely efficiently.

the 1970s or 1980s. As an authorial note appended to the end of the narrative attests, the novel was written at Comana, between 1983 and 1989, except, that is, for the last chapter, which was completed in March 1991. In the age in which it was written, the novel would have stood no chance of being published; on the contrary, it would have undoubtedly jeopardised its author's career and personal destiny. The narrative content of the book abounds in events and commentaries that confirm the oppressive reality of the communist regime prior to 1989.

The Drawer of Applause is a novel about *escape*. Flight is the obsessive idea that permeates this narrative. Seen as a gesture of cowardice, as a mark of the vanquished, flight is the subject of much theorisation in the book. This thesis is explicitly formulated through the voice of one character: "The fact that flight is a historical constant does not preclude its being a sign of defeat. Despite common opinion, it rarely brings forth the salvation expected of it. Much more often and in a much more profound sense, it is an *ars moriendi*, an art of forsaking life. Moreover, in radical cases it does embrace the form of suicide. It is in this sense alone that it also amounts to a sort of deliverance."

The novel essentially resumes a series of traditions whose roots are in the interwar period: the relativisation of the narrative vision through stream-of-consciousness techniques; the intellectual protagonist – an antihero by definition, who is immersed within the transitory forms of the world and becomes thus a sum of responses to it, which are narratively consigned to paper; the debate of ideas, etc. The novel's structure combines, therefore, an elite strand of subjectivist fiction, of existentialist extraction, at times, with a surrealist, oneiric formula, laden with symbolical meaning. The latter is to be found at the end of the narrative, obviously opening the text towards the limitlessness of interpretation, as it has been theorised by Eco.

The author makes equal use of a narrative technique derived from late modernism and frequently used in epic postmodernity, namely the "unconcealed palimpsest," whereby several parallel discourses, in this case, three, generate and mutually condition themselves. In doubtlessly textualist manner, one of these discourses belongs to the author herself. Through it, Blandiana constructs the journal of the novel and of its creation in parallel with the unfolding of the novel itself. What in other writers' works (for instance, in Liviu Rebreanu's novels) are two radically different textual "planets" are here incorporated within one and the same narrative body. The "journal" even offers a carefully wrought scheme of the three discursive fluxes that provide narrative substance to the book. The first of these is the protagonist's interior discourse, which is written in the first person and is extremely subjectivised. The second is the "exterior," objectivised, authorial discourse, composed in the third person and in the imperfect past tense. This is, as the prose writer declares, the "most literary" of the three fluxes. Fragments of delationist discourse are every now and again added to the main stream of the narrative, somewhat in the manner of Augustin Buzura's novel *Orgolii (Vainglories)*.

Finally, the third textual streak is that of the confession of a narrator-*author*, which is again rendered in the first person. It fills the novel's undissimulated, anti-fictional world with reality.

Plot development occupies a secondary place compared to the emphasis allotted to situations that are deemed to be representative for the characters' psychology. Thus, the opening scene in the novel presents the book's protagonist, Alexandru Șerban, a successful writer during the Romanian totalitarian regime, whose repressive apparatus does not hesitate to mount its pressures against him. In a scene with hallucinating Kafkesque touches, a private party thrown at the writer's place is intruded upon by three Security agents. They institute a regime of terror and arbitrariness against the intellectuals present at the gathering. The latter are brutally interrupted from a series of conversations that have just had on the very concepts of freedom, historical ethics and the dialectics of culture. The scene provides the occasion for a first encounter with (and description of) forms of *escape*. Here are two of them: the metaphysical refuge within one's own conscience and subjectivity, which, in actual fact, is a concealed form of *cowardice*, or physical, *de facto*, flight. Șerban resorts to the latter. Literally fleeing from his apartment, the character salvages his psychological and not merely his actual, concrete freedom. He thus resists the inner dissolution that his acceptance of any form of terror imposed from outside might trigger.

The next episode in Șerban's biographical destiny is even more dramatic. Together with two fellow writers, he is invited to a series of conferences which are to be held in an unknown institution. As they are about to find out, this is a former convent, which has been converted into a "re-education" establishment. The protagonist is confined for an indeterminate period inside a cell of the hospital. Here he experiences new forms of withdrawal from the face of aggression. This period corresponds to a second initiation stage for Șerban into what might be termed *the paradoxical forms of freedom*. Besieged by Doctor Bentan's insidiously Mefistophelean speeches and by Sabina the psychologist's subtle advances, under the permanent (albeit obscure, merely intimidated) supervision of comrade Mardare, the head of the establishment, Alexandru Șerban barely maintains his reason intact. This episode also contains the scene and the symbol that have given the book its title. In one of the institution's offices, Șerban discovers the "drawer of applause" – in actual fact a drawer full of tapes on which various types of applauses have been recorded. What follows next is a sophisticated axiology of "applaudism," both as a political art and as an institutional lie. The novel's metaphorical symbolism becomes increasingly more explicit. The patients in the institution, who are turned into automatons capable of producing applause on command, allegorically describe the dangers of acquiescence to terror and of extreme dehumanisation, in the manner captured by Orwell in *1984*. The allegory is given an oneiric resolution, through Șerban's escape attempt: what he discovers outside the hospital gates is a sea of *applauders*, who are by no means different from the ones inside. This is a farce of

tragic proportions, which the protagonist glosses on with sheer stupefaction. The scene in which the nearby church is demolished becomes, in its turn, a rather transparent rendition of the ontological mutation affecting this “upside down” world. Redemptive, metaphysical verticality is supplanted by conformist horizontality. Having left the empire of eternal Truth, the world has entered that of mortifying history.

Șerban’s apartment, from the first scene in the novel, and the re-education hospital, where he is committed, symbolically function as places of *refuge* for the character. His retreat in the former is a natural gesture, whereas confinement in the latter, concentrationist space represents a coercion imposed upon him. Both spaces fail to provide Șerban with a safe haven; he leaves them, heading for a third place of refuge. This is the ascetic hut from Plai, on the banks of the river Danube, an arid paradise, in the proximity of a huge forbidden vineyard. Here, the archaeologist Tudor Țârnea administers, together with a group of students, the diggings inside an old Byzantine city from one of the Danube islands. In his company, Șerban seems to eschew reality, seeking refuge in contemplation, in idea debates, in imaginary voyages throughout history and, above all, in writing his own book. The Book acquires the value of a consolatory and protective *codex aureus*. It becomes his reason for being, serving as a compensatory model for the brutal universe outside. This paradisiacal illusion is dispelled only too soon by the violent intrusion of the same three malefic characters from the beginning of the novel. The three agents of Power break the fragile norms of the graceful edifice of peace and quiet from Plai and burn the manuscript pages before the very eyes of the dismayed writer. Confronted with the concrete manifestation of Power, the abstract magic of the fictional universe vanishes.

The novel closes its universe up by surrealistically submerging it under the grimy deluge of a mythical Danube that is overflowing its banks. The river becomes a negatively inflected symbol of corrupted, stifling language, the avatar of a destructive epoch. This final passage oneirically melds together the three discursive strands within one common vortex; the *writer* herself meets her *character*, as both are doomed to descend beneath the water’s surface: “I start yelling, as I put my arms around him, while the water is reaching our ankles, our knees [...] There has to be a solution. Tell me what I should do! I can do anything: I am the author! But the water reaches our chests, our shoulders, it soaks the wings that are now hanging heavy and squashy, like tatters. ‘Spread your wings!’ I cry out, sobbing with tears and trying to stretch them by force, while the water is reaching our necks, filling our mouths and nostrils, drowning the sounds that still float on water for a while. ‘What would be the point?’ I hear. ‘You can’t escape from your own book...’ ‘Yes, I can, I can,’ I stubbornly keep sobbing, fretting, trying to win one more second swallowing the fetid, poisonous liquid. ‘I can do anything... I am the author. I can change it...’”

The shortest chapter in the book is the twentieth and it consists of two quatrains. This brief poem may serve as a generic motto, which the novel faithfully adheres to. The author appears to believe that in a totalitarian, concentrationist

universe, “any flight is an escape/ any escape is a defeat.” A novel about *escape*, *The Drawer of Applause* reminds the reader of history’s tragic traps, as well as of the fluid forms that self-aware humans may embrace when drawn in the perilous, hazardous race of discovering their own failures.

Ana Blandiana’s *The Drawer of Applause* belongs, as mentioned before, to a generation of texts making direct reference to the traumatic realities of the Romanian society. The symbolic-metaphorical imaginary pattern serves as an aesthetic methodology whereby the narrative may uncover concrete historical Truths. The relationship I-world-text represents the instrument for the symbolical fictionalisation of a social-political epoch and of a literary period in which textualist writing techniques had already become entrenched.

On another level, in another “age of the novel,”⁴ the aestheticist perspective took precedence over the political fable. 1969, the year when Sânziana Pop’s novel *Serenade for Trumpet* came out, represented a more relaxed ideological time period – only a false liberalisation, as it would be revealed several years later. Notwithstanding all this, a rather poignant illusion of liberty had led to a re-emergence of the structures of Romanian modernism, which had been prematurely suppressed, so that they could carry out their literary destiny. *Serenade for Trumpet* may be approached as an instance of the aestheticist perspective on the history of Romanian literature from the latter half of the twentieth century.

The surrealist structure of Sânziana Pop’s novel is gradually revealed as the reader progresses into the labyrinth of the narrative. This structure is essentially the outcome of the narrative voice lapsing into a series of oneiric stances, which are only recognisable as such (namely as oneiric) once the moments of “awakening” have been consigned to paper. The book relies on a first-person discourse which seems to ensure the subjectivist strand of this work; however, the text is also not removed from the formula of a realist construction of the fictional world. Several melodramatic touches are fortunately counteracted by the constant “amendments” made by an omnipresent ironical stance, which *remedies* the discourse, bestowing upon it a ludic aura, which is occasionally tinged, though, with tragic or grotesque nuances.

The protagonist’s destiny gains contours in the novel from the narrative strips she recounts herself. Through repeated retractions and obsessive contrapuntal additions, what emerges is the saga of a family whose feminine line conceives of existence as an adventure of freedom, taken to paroxysmic extremes. Puica-Neagra, as she introduces herself during a hilarious French class, or Pinella, as a character named the Boss calls her, is a red-haired, fifteen-year old girl, whose ironical-ingenious confession provides the narrative substance of the book. She appears to be imprisoned in the Stone House, an ambivalent space of death and perverted

⁴ In Liviu Petrescu’s terms, from *The Poetics of Postmodernism* (Pitești: Paralela 45, 1996, passim). The first edition of this volume, published by the Eminescu Publishing House from Bucharest, actually bore the title *The Ages of the Novel*.

passions, in which a detested uncle (the Commander), a Harpagon-like figure, draconically lays down the law of *minimal existence*, reduced to its mechanical, strictly programmed aspects. Pinella is the daughter of an impassioned woman, who went berserk on her husband's death (by execution, apparently, at the end of the war) and who ended up wandering naked through the mountain woods, in full view of the forest rangers. In her uncle's home, the girl retraces Cinderella's destiny, together with her grandmother, Manana (Maria Oniga).

The first part of the book, entitled *Day One. You Loved Him, He Loved You*, is concerned with deploying a formula that will ensure descriptive verisimilitude. The author reconstructs here the evanescent images of the parents. They are summoned back from the shadows of memory into a symbolical, legendary existence, and are upheld as exemplary images and models of passionate living. The narrative also interweaves here the fragmentary story of Manana's destiny, now a prisoner in a wheelchair. The old woman once asserted her thirst for freedom through a scandalous affair she had, when she was seventy, with an anonymous Policeman. Almost in the manner of Balzac's novels, the figures of a bizarre bestiary start cropping up in the pages of the book, amounting to a set of character types: the Commander, auntie Alice and their daughter, Clara-Maria-Despine; Mezanfan, the grotesque French teacher; Erji, the peasant-soubrette, a devoted slave of the family, like in the Victorian novels. On the other hand, such a conclave of static, conventional figures is every now and again short-circuited by hallucinatory apparitions: Muter, Manana, Leonard-the-Policeman, Schuster, Iacob-Enius-Dioclețian and Uli the Blond Man, the pastor's son. Through these characters, the text orbits outside the limits of *verisimilitude* and into *hallucinosi*s, which, together with the fact that *types* are replaced with *symbols*, ensures the narrative's distinct initiatory streak. The result is a split, tense structure. The writer's germane insight allows this tension to remain, throughout the entire novel, the primary source of the imaginary, from which erupt analytical enunciations of great acuity.

Against such a background, the second part (entitled *Day Two. Vivere Pericolosamente*) maps out the protagonist's journey through the City. She searches for the company of "clean" beings, who have not been perverted by the poisonous vapours of the City, so that they may keep vigil by the side of Manana's grave during her first night of eternal sleep. This is a journey of initiation. As the heroine confesses, the form of total freedom she aspires to is that of *self-exit* ("I want total freedom. I want to get rid of myself, by all means. Good bye."), as well as that of self-projection, sometimes filled with Bovarism, at other times in the symbolical image of the *inspired wanderer*. This is an attempt at reiterating or presentifying the quixotic myth of the romantic de-realisation of the world. From this moment onward, gliding into the realm of hallucination becomes a prerequisite for existence. Discursive logic undergoes fundamental mutations. Mashed in the pulp of the imaginary, the facts of reality "curve" to the point of melting. The vision follows a paralogic conclusively linked to affective factors: "The house walls were

obviously bulging, the windows were going out of orbit, the doors were too narrow and helpless for those bellies overflowing across the pavement. Had a woman with ox-leather sandals not pulled me by my hand, there's no doubt I would have been squashed between the last two houses on the corner, packed together as they were by growing too close to one another [...] Bulbous, the window panes were about to burst, casting that fierce gaze of frogs on the verge of launching an attack."

A poetics of stasis supplants, therefore, the realist convention or the touch of verisimilitude of the universe described here.⁵ The Blecherian type of immediate unreality seems the most appropriate label for such a formula, with all its common inventory of particular "good places" and "bad places." In Sânziana Pop's novel, these places are no longer sought after for the grotesque or delicious artifices they provide the character with; they simply "happen" to the female traveller as she unravels the labyrinth of the world, taking it into possession. The *interpretation of the universe*, by way of its (subjective) *fictionalisation*, becomes the fundamental manner of bringing the novelistic world into being. Summed up, the symbolism of the elements charts the map of a *different*, hostile, yet challenging space. The being (the subject) explores this space with both determination and irony. Oftentimes contemplating herself as a *stranger*,⁶ the protagonist escapes from the trap of the world's opaque mirrors, always looking for *light* and *redemption*. She appears to have found them in the last scene, the wake by the burial site, when the final ritual of lighting the candle and honouring the dead (or *death* itself) marks the end of the last stage in her initiation and obtaining utmost freedom. Having been redeemed, the heroine may now fulfil her destiny. As a true daughter of her mother, she has searched for the light of *burning love* ("You're burning now, Uli [...] Burning, Uli. Please [...] I took Uli by the hand and walked away on the gravelled path, and I sang, and Uli kept burning.")

One more brick laid to the edifice of Romanian surrealism or, rather, oneirism in the 1970s, in the immediate wake of oneirism in the 1960s, the novel *Serenade for Trumpet* insistently clamours its individuality. It evinces the presence of a prose writer with remarkable imaginative powers, who will not disavow the lyrical streak that defines her specific profile.

⁵ See also the discussion on *Serenade for Trumpet* between the oneiric prose writer Dumitru Țepeneag and the critic Laurențiu Ulici, published in *Luceafărul* (no. 23, 7 July 1969, pp. 6-7).

⁶ See Laura Pavel's interpretations on the above-mentioned dialogue from *Luceafărul*, in the volume entitled *Dumitru Țepeneag and the Canon of Alternative Literature* (Cluj-Napoca: Cărții de Știință Publishing House, 2007, pp. 105-106). The analyst starts from Țepeneag's theory on what he calls, in the said dialogue, the "false scene method," which is to be encountered in the aesthetic construction of Sânziana Pop's novel. Laura Pavel's critical and theoretical interpretation starts from the postulation of an "off to the split textual consciousness," and then proceeds by highlighting the cinematic unfolding of the narrative text, as a "recounted film," in which a "textual director may even insert a note of arbitrariness that will contradict the verisimilitude of the plotline. This is so because in modern fiction, the relation with reality is not based on homology, like in the traditional aesthetics of *mimesis*, but on analogy."

Both *The Drawer of Applause* and *Serenade for Trumpet* represent aesthetic alternatives for the resolution of tensions within the literary field. After the “thematic and stylistic frost from the dogmatic age,”⁷ autochthonous writers pushed through the ideological limits of expression. Literary creation thus entered into implicit or explicit antagonistic relations with the political history that served as its contextual background. Women writers fit, through their texts, in the cultural symptomatology of the age. Notable voices in the literary concert, prose writers like Ana Blandiana or Sânziana Pop explored remarkable aesthetic hypostases of narrative fiction, endorsing, through their works, reading hypotheses for a much desired/hoped for liberation of the being and the text.

Translated by Carmen Borbely

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⁷ See Nicolae Manolescu, *op. cit.*, p. 1047.

UN CÉLIBATAIRE AUX SENSIBILITÉS DIFFÉRENTES. UNE RE-LECTURE QUEER DE GOUVERNAIL DANS « A RESPECTABLE WOMAN » PAR KATE CHOPIN

ZÉNÓ VERNYIK¹

ABSTRACT. "*Un célibataire aux sensibilités différentes. Une re-lecture queer de Gouvernail dans « A Respectable Woman » par Kate Chopin*". This paper deals with Gouvernail, a literate, urban intellectual from the story "A Respectable Woman" by Kate Chopin. Our claim is that we may read this text in a way that is thoroughly different from the usual readings. Namely, we claim that the heterosexual love triangle from the story veils a sexually more controversial one. Our reading strategy is *homographesis*, which means identifying a textual occurrence that has more than one possible signifieds. In our case, *the compulsory story*, veils the subversive *other* and, thus, unveils a radically different, queer text.

Keywords: homographesis, compulsory heterosexuality, queer, love triangle, masculinity

REZUMAT. "*Un celibatar cu sensibilități diferite. Un alt mod de a interpreta personajul Gouvernail din O femeie respectabilă de Kate Chopin*". Articolul de față este o analiză a personajului Gouvernail, o intelectuală de la oraș, din nuvela „O femeie respectabilă” de Kate Chopin. Autorul sugerează un alt mod de interpretare a textului față de cele tradiționale, arătând că în spatele triunghiului amoros din nuvelă se ascunde o sexualitate mult mai controversată. Strategia de lectură este *homografia*, adică identificarea unei secvențe din text căreia i se pot da mai multe interpretări. În cazul de față, *lectura obligatorie* ascunde o *alta* subversivă, aducând astfel la lumină un text radical diferit.

Cuvinte cheie: homografie, heterosexuality obligatorie, homosexual, triunghi amoros, masculinitate

Comme le souligne Pearl L. Brown, « [m]uch has been written about KateChopin’s defiant women, [...] [but] very little has been written about Chopin’s defiant men »² (Brown 69)³. Et bien que cela soit sans doute vrai, on peut ajouter

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² Je suis l’auteur de toutes les traductions françaises dans les notes.

que même le peu de recherches disponibles sur ces personnages est plutôt pauvre. C'est en partie parce qu'ils sont souvent considérés seulement de manière superficielle et par rapport aux personnages féminins, et en partie parce que, si les lectures se concentrent principalement sur un ou plusieurs hommes, elles ont tendance à rester des lectures adoptant un point de vue conservateur. Au moins, cela est certainement vrai en ce qui concerne l'article publié en 1981 par Joyce Dyer « Gouvernail, Kate Chopin's Sensitive Bachelor, » ainsi que l'essai de Patricia Hopkins Lattin, publié en 1980, « Kate Chopin's Repeating Characters, » ou encore l'article déjà cité de Pearl L. Brown et la brève note de Bernard J. Koloski, publié en 1974 dans *American Literature*.

Le point de vue conservateur de ces lectures revêt une importance extraordinaire, puisque ces quatre textes sont les seuls que je connaisse qui traitent de Gouvernail, un intellectuel urbain très instruit qui apparaît dans trois histoires de Chopin et une seule de ces analyses, l'essai de Dyer, traite explicitement et surtout du personnage. Quoique le faible nombre d'articles ne soit pas surprenant puisque Gouvernail n'apparaît que dans très peu d'histoires, le fait que ces lectures peuvent être considérées comme hétérosexistes et patriarcales, et qu'elles minimisent nettement les aspects les plus controversés du personnage et des histoires, requiert une attention et une réinterprétation critiques.

Ma lecture, donc, est celle de l'altérité. Je fais remarquer qu'il est possible de lire une de ces trois histoires d'une manière qui est tout à fait différente de la lecture habituelle. Ce faisant, mon approche est la stratégie de lecture de l'*homographesis*: je suis constamment à la recherche de telles occurrences textuelles qui ont plus d'un sens possible signifié. Lors de l'analyse de ces points, je montre comment le sens habituel voile un autre sens subversif que révèle une lecture *queer* de l'histoire, radicalement différente.

En utilisant cette stratégie, je propose de montrer que dans « A Respectable Woman » le triangle amoureux hétérosexuel, identifié par des lectures existantes, voile l'histoire sexuellement plus controversée. C'est-à-dire, la « respectabilité » de Mme Baroda ne se réfère pas à sa fidélité conjugale, mais à sa volonté de garder le silence sur le passé commun de son mari et de Gouvernail et sur leur attraction mutuelle.

Le squelette de « A Respectable Woman » pourrait se résumer comme suit: la vie monotone d'un couple marié (M. et Mme Baroda) arrive à un tournant en raison de l'arrivée inquiétante de l'ancien ami de collège de M. Gaston Baroda: Gouvernail. Au bout de quelques jours, et après une scène courte mais bizarre se déroulant dans la nuit, Mme Baroda décide de quitter leur domaine jusqu'à ce que Gouvernail fasse la même chose. Cependant, un peu plus tard, elle change apparemment d'avis ou de sentiments et, par conséquent, elle revient avec l'idée d'inviter à nouveau leur hôte.

³ On a beaucoup écrit sur les femmes rebelles de Kate Chopin, [...] [mais] très peu a été écrit sur les hommes rebels de Chopin

La raison pour laquelle je me suis abstenu de faire plus que la simple énumération des événements les plus élémentaires et des faits, c'est que je soutiens ci-dessous que même si l'histoire a surtout été interprétée dans le même sens, il y a, en réalité, plus d'une possibilité pour interpréter le reste du texte. C'est-à-dire, tandis que la présence d'un couple et d'une troisième personne, en plus du titre lui-même, semble impliquer une certaine lecture, à savoir celle d'un triangle amoureux hétérosexuel, il y a une possibilité de le comprendre comme décrivant un triangle ambigu qui est au moins homosocial, et potentiellement de nature homosexuelle.

L'histoire, telle que l'entend Joyce Dyer, est un bon exemple de cette préférence pour un triangle amoureux hétérosexuel insatisfait: l'ami et l'épouse deviennent impliqués dans une liaison amoureuse. Cette optique est à peu près parallèle à la lecture faite par Emily Toth. Elle classe cette nouvelle comme une des œuvres de Chopin touchant à la nostalgie éprouvée par les femmes pour d'autres hommes que leur mari (168). Toth résume le texte comme celui dans lequel Kate Chopin « described a woman who was attracted to her husband's best friend – and who *might* pursue the attraction » (233, c'est moi qui souligne).⁴ Cela pourrait, bien sûr, se reporter à la fin ambiguë de l'histoire, causée par le manque d'information sur d'autres événements.

Mais si l'on examine plus attentivement ces deux lectures, on voit que de ces deux conceptions pratiquement identiques, celle de Dyer, en effet, est encore plus étroite, encore plus traditionnelle et patriarcale. Tandis que Toth a au moins admis la possibilité d'une relation amoureuse, Dyer – en écrivant sur les trois niveaux du caractère de Gouvernail – établit l'ordre suivant du développement du caractère: « progression from sensual bachelor ('A Respectable Woman') to disappointed lover ('Athénaïse') to love cynic (*The Awakening*). » (54).⁵ Il est facile de reconnaître que Dyer considère la possibilité d'une relation amoureuse émergente uniquement dans le cadre de la deuxième histoire. C'est-à-dire, tandis que dans la lecture de Toth, même si l'émergence d'une relation dans le futur est mise en doute, l'amour et l'attraction sont des faits reconnus et incontestés, pour Dyer, même l'amour et / ou l'attraction ne sont qu'une possibilité: au lieu d'un triangle amoureux classique, elle en montre la seule possibilité.

Le désir, cependant, est reconnu même dans la lecture de Dyer. À son avis, Gouvernail parle du plaisir sensuel de la nuit pendant qu'il est assis à côté de Mme Baroda. Il sait que, de cette façon, il suscite le désir en elle, tout comme il sent la puissance de la passion en lui-même (Dyer 48). Ce point de vue, si l'on se souvient que Dyer ne parle pas de l'amour – c'est-à-dire, si l'on veut comprendre la situation dans un cadre de référence strictement hétérosexuelle – ne laisse que peu de possibilités de comprendre ce qui se passe entre les deux personnages.

⁴ Elle a décrit une femme qui était attirée par le meilleur ami de son mari – et qui pourrait succomber à sa séduction

⁵ Progression du célibataire sensuel (« A Respectable Woman ») à l'amant déçu (« Athénaïse ») à quelqu'un de cynique en amour

Ce rétrécissement de l'espace d'interprétation peut être considéré comme l'idéalisation du mariage hétérosexuel (Rich 234), qui fait partie de l'idéologie patriarcale qu'Adrienne Rich appelle *hétérosexualité obligatoire* (232). Cependant, l'article de Rich contient aussi implicitement un mode « standard » de vie, un récit idéalisé par la société: deux personnes de sexes différents se rencontrent, ils tombent amoureux, se marient, procréent, puis meurent.⁶ Dans les paragraphes suivants, ce mode de vie est paraphrasé comme *l'histoire obligatoire*.⁷ Ces constructions idéologiques sont responsables de l'hostilité générale envers tous les désirs érotiques et les comportements sexuels qui ne sont pas conformes à la disposition traditionnelle. Elles essaient de présenter l'hétérosexualité comme normative, et bien plus, comme la façon naturelle de se comporter sexuellement.

La stratégie suivie par Dyer peut être considérée, par conséquent, comme une réduction d'un récit complexe à ce qui est construit et visé par la société comme la lecture normative et non-signifiée, c'est-à-dire, à *l'histoire obligatoire*. Cela rappelle la déclaration de Winfried Fluck: « If something remains unsatisfactory about the many useful readings of Chopin's texts so far, it is a tendency to ignore their 'experimental' character » (152).⁸ Ce qui est en jeu ici, c'est une ignorance peut être dangereuse par rapport à d'autres lectures éventuelles: c'est de ne pas reconnaître que « Chopin's fiction, and particularly her short stories are subversive documents » (Beer 28).⁹

Mais les interprètes de l'histoire ne sont pas tous d'accord avec Toth et Dyer. Patricia Hopkins Lattin, sur la base d'une analyse antérieure par Bernard J. Koloski (608), décrit Gouvernail comme un « literate intellectual who serves as a 'sophisticated observer' or catalyst » (Lattin 31).¹⁰ Même si son point de vue est très proche de celui de Dyer, sa déclaration est d'une très haute importance, et elle semble en contradiction avec l'interprétation de Dyer. Un observateur ne participe jamais à l'action, ni ne change le cours des événements. Jakob Lothe écrit dans « Events, Characters, and Characterization », paraphrasant la notion de la dichotomie *des fonctions cardinales* (ou *noyaux*) et *des catalyses* de Roland Barthes (8), que « A kernel is a 'cardinal function' which promotes the action by [...] [inducing one] or more alternatives to choose between » (Lothe 75-6),¹¹ alors que le « catalyst accompanies [only] and complements the kernel » (76)¹², puisqu'il « does not open [...] an alternative that is of

⁶ Cf. "heterosexuality is presumed the sexual preference of 'most women'," "motherhood [...] needs to be studied as a political institution," "women have been convinced that marriage and sexual orientation toward men are inevitable" (Rich 1993, 229-234). (l'hétérosexualité est la préférence sexuelle présumée de « la plupart des femmes », la maternité [...] doit être étudiée en tant qu'institution politique, les femmes ont été convaincues que le mariage et l'orientation sexuelle envers les hommes sont inévitables)

⁷ Tous mes remerciements à Réka M. Cristian qui m'a mentionné le fait que j'utilise ici.

⁸ Si quelque chose reste insatisfaisant sur les nombreuses lectures utiles des textes de Chopin à ce jour, c'est une tendance à ignorer le caractère « expérimental » des textes

⁹ La fiction de Chopin, et en particulier ses nouvelles, sont des documents subversifs

¹⁰ Un intellectuel instruit qui fonctionne comme un observateur sophistiqué ou un catalyseur

¹¹ Un noyau est une « fonction cardinale » qui anime l'action en induisant une ou plusieurs solutions entre lesquelles on peut choisir

¹² Le catalyseur accompagne et complète le noyau

direct consequence for the development of the story » (76).¹³ Alors que ni Barthes, ni Lothe ne parlent de personnages mais d'événements, il semble cependant logique d'élargir la portée du terme aux personnages, en s'appuyant sur l'article de Lattin et sur l'histoire elle-même. En effet, Gouvernail – en tant que catalyseur – peut provoquer un enchaînement plus rapide ou plus lent des événements, il peut aider le protagoniste ou vice versa, mais il ne peut pas être un agent actif, un *noyau*.

De plus, Gouvernail est un nom parlant, comme le démontre la lecture de l'article publié dans *Le Maxidico. Dictionnaire encyclopédique de la langue française*:

GOUVERNAIL, subst. m. 1. Mar. Plaque de bois ou de métal fixée sur un axe, servant à diriger un navire; [...] **2.** Fig. *Tenir le gouvernail*: diriger, commander.

Même s'il peut sembler que le gouvernail soit la partie d'un navire qui définisse sa route, il n'en est rien: ce n'est pas le gouvernail qui décide de la direction suivie par le bateau, mais la personne qui le dirige. Ainsi, Gouvernail ne peut pas être un séducteur, comme le dit Dyer. Koloski implicitement partage cette opinion, car il parle du fait que Gouvernail est « awake [...] to the essence of what is happening about him » (609)¹⁴ et, comme il a été souligné ci-dessus, il l'identifie essentiellement à un observateur sophistiqué (608).

Autrement dit, la lecture de Lattin va plus loin que celle de Dyer, car elle sort du cadre d'interprétation de *l'histoire obligatoire*. En effet, elle ne décrit pas Gouvernail par le rôle trop évident du séducteur. Cependant, elle reste encore dans le cadre de *l'hétérosexualité obligatoire*, car elle fait de Gouvernail un personnage encore plus étranger à l'histoire du mari et de la femme.

Toutefois, il est intéressant de jeter un oeil à la première phrase de l'histoire. « MRS. BARODA was a little provoked to learn that her husband expected his friend, Gouvernail, »¹⁵ commence l'histoire (Chopin 389). Par cette insistance, je me réfère à la conception de Peter Brooks qui suppose que le début prédit toujours et « presupposes the end » (93).¹⁶ Bien qu'il semble que « [w]hen you narrate, you [...] start with a beginning » (92)¹⁷, en réalité, « you have started at the end. It is there, invisible and present » (93).¹⁸ D'une manière invisible et symbolique, le début de l'histoire dit beaucoup, sinon tout, sur la façon dont l'histoire se termine. À la fin, Gaston attendra de nouveau le même invité qu'au point de départ. Il est également possible de déduire que Mme Baroda ne sera jamais impatiente de revoir Gouvernail, qu'elle ne profitera pas de sa visite et qu'elle n'aimera jamais vraiment son retour.

Peu de temps de la narration s'est déjà écoulé, avant qu'elle ne reconnaisse que l'invité ne ressemble en rien à l'image mentale qu'elle s'était construite d'après ce que Gaston lui avait dit de Gouvernail: « She could discover in him

¹³ Il n'ouvre pas une alternative qui aurait des conséquences directes sur le développement de l'histoire

¹⁴ Éveillé [...] à l'essence de ce qui se passe autour de lui

¹⁵ Mme BARODA a été un peu provoquée d'apprendre que son mari attendait son ami Gouvernail

¹⁶ Présuppose la fin

¹⁷ Lorsque vous faites un récit, vous [...] commencez avec un début

¹⁸ Vous avez commencé à la fin. Il est là, invisible et présent

none of those brilliant and promising traits which Gaston, her husband, had often assured her that he possessed » (Chopin 390).¹⁹ Mme Baroda est déçue. Comme si elle voyait un autre Gouvernail, différent de celui que son mari lui avait décrit. Qui plus est, l'invité n'essaye même pas de gagner sa sympathie: « he made no direct appeal to her approval or even esteem » (390),²⁰ au contraire, il reste passivement assis, « listening attentively to Gaston's experience as a sugar planter » (390).²¹

Cette passivité et le manque d'intérêt pour Mme Baroda cadrent bien avec le rôle de Gouvernail comme catalyseur ou gouvernail, mais sont complètement contraires aux interprétations de Dyer et Toth. On peut le confirmer en réalisant que Gouvernail rend même Mme Baroda mal à l'aise: « Gouvernail's personality puzzled Mrs. Baroda » (Chopin 391).²² Elle demande, par conséquent, « When is he going – your friend? » (391).²³ Étant dans une situation si désagréable, elle quitte sa maison et ne revient pas avant que l'invité ne soit parti. Mais avant qu'elle ne parte, une étrange et exceptionnelle rencontre de nuit les rapproche.

Cette rencontre mystérieuse et nocturne, comme cela a déjà été souligné, est considérée par Dyer comme un épisode du désir entre homme et femme et des interdictions imposées par les liens du mariage. Comme il a déjà été noté, elle souligne que « Gouvernail, like Mrs. Baroda, might also be experiencing the turbulence of passion. Perhaps it is not only the still, warm night and baneful air that arouse him »²⁴ (Dyer 31). Elle affirme que les deux lignes d'un poème de Whitman citées par Gouvernail sont choisies délibérément, parce qu'il sait qu'elles exhalent une forte connotation sexuelle. Mme Baroda répond aux vers comme s'ils étaient un compliment qui lui serait adressé (31).

Cependant, il est facile de reconnaître la contradiction entre une aversion explicite envers Gouvernail – pendant que Mme Baroda est déroutée et mal à l'aise – et la passion agitée, écrasante, de l'amour éprouvé envers la même personne. Ces sentiments négatifs peuvent, bien sûr, être causés par le dilemme provoqué par cette situation: y a-t-il lieu d'être fidèle ou de laisser la passion prendre le contrôle? Mais il y a des preuves solides contre une telle interprétation. Mme Baroda montre dès le début des signes de répugnance à l'égard de Gouvernail. Sa nervosité et sa gêne sont présentes dès le premier instant, alors qu'il est encore impossible de penser à l'amour ou la passion, à moins que l'on ne pense au coup de foudre. Toutefois, de telles émotions contredisent clairement la déception qu'elle ressent à l'arrivée de Gouvernail.

Gouvernail, contrairement aux attentes de Mme Baroda, reste absolument passif et assez féminin: « [h]e did not care to fish, and displayed no eagerness to go

¹⁹ Elle n'a pu découvrir en lui aucun de ces traits brillants et prometteurs que Gaston, son mari, lui avait souvent assuré qu'il possédait

²⁰ Il n'a fait aucun appel direct à son approbation, ni même à son estime

²¹ Écoutant attentivement l'expérience de Gaston quand il était planteur de cannes

²² La personnalité de Gouvernail a rendu perplexe Mme Baroda

²³ Quand s'en va-t-il – ton ami?

²⁴ Gouvernail, tout comme Mme Baroda, pourrait également éprouver les turbulences de la passion. Peut-être ce n'est pas seulement la nuit immobile et chaude et l'air sinistre qui le réveillent

out and kill grosbecks when Gaston proposed doing so »²⁵ (Chopin 391). Il est habituellement assis « mute and receptive »²⁶ (390), et il a ses humeurs et ses « periods of reserve »²⁷ (394). En plus, il ignore complètement Mme Baroda, la seule femme de la maison, même si elle essaie de susciter son intérêt à la fois en l'évitant et en lui imposant sa compagnie, tout à fait en vain. Gouvernail « made no direct appeal to her approval or even esteem »²⁸ (390). Le vieil ami de Gaston ne fait pas le moindre effort pour se conformer à la politesse la plus élémentaire exigée d'un invité, pour ne pas dire d'un gentleman: il n'essaie ni d'avoir la grâce de l'hôtesse ni de gagner sa sympathie. Il n'apprécie pas quand elle essaie de lui faire plaisir; apparemment, il ne lui prête aucune attention. « Gouvernail does not register either Mrs. Baroda's indifference or her imposition of her presence upon him »²⁹ (Beer 50). Il n'entame jamais la conversation, ne bavarde jamais longuement avec la propriétaire, mais se contente généralement d'écouter Gaston. Il est « decidedly lacking in the courtliness of the Creole gigolo »³⁰ (Brown 72). Ainsi, il est facile de voir la contradiction entre la façon dont Gaston voit Gouvernail, et son comportement réel. L'homme que le mari de Mme Baroda estime si parfait et si particulier se révèle être tout à fait différent. Sa perfection n'existe que dans l'esprit de Gaston qui le voit de cette façon: Gaston est partial.

L'indice textuel suivant est d'une importance capitale: quelques jours plus tard, l'attitude de Mme Baroda change radicalement. Et c'est la manière dont on lit ce que Mme Baroda devient qui décide comment on comprend le reste de l'histoire. Le mot qui décrit ce nouvel état est « piqued ». *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language* donne la signification suivante:

piqued¹ *v.*, piqued, piquing, *n.* —*v.t.* **1.** to affect sharp irritation and resentment, esp. by some wound to pride: *He piqued her by refusing her invitation.* **2.** to wound (the pride, vanity, etc.) **3.** to excite (interest, curiosity, etc.): *Her curiosity was piqued by what the town gossips were saying.* **4.** to arouse an emotion or provoke to action: *to pique someone to answer a challenge.* **5.** *Archaic.* to pride (oneself) (usually fol. by *on* or *upon*): *He piqued himself on his elegant manners.* **6.** *Aeron. Obs.* to dive at.

L'article du dictionnaire fait remarquer clairement que cette expression peut signifier deux choses radicalement différentes: Mme Baroda pourrait se sentir agacée ou en colère, mais elle pourrait aussi bien avoir été sexuellement excitée. Alors, c'est cette deuxième façon de comprendre l'occurrence que la plupart des critiques ont considérée comme évidente, mais il semble y avoir au moins autant, sinon plus, de preuves d'une compréhension possible basée sur le sens premier.

²⁵ Il ne s'intéressait pas à la pêche et n'a montré aucune envie de sortir pour tuer des grosbecks quand Gaston lui a proposé de le faire

²⁶ Muet et réceptif

²⁷ Périodes de réserve

²⁸ N'a fait aucun appel direct ni à son approbation ni même à son estime

²⁹ Gouvernail ne perçoit ni l'indifférence de Mme Baroda ni son effort pour rester en sa présence

³⁰ Il manque décidément de la courtoisie du gigolo créole

Le rôle textuel particulier du mot « piqué » est basé directement sur ses significations multiples, et sur le fait que, selon ces significations, il pourrait diriger le récit dans des directions différentes. L'une d'elles s'harmonise avec les attentes de la société ou du lecteur, tandis que l'autre les contredit. C'est le moment où il est opportun d'utiliser la stratégie de lecture de l'*homographesis*. Comme Lee Edelman le soutient, l'homographe se caractérise par « no singular entity, »³¹ ainsi il « precipitates into meaning by virtue of its linear, its metonymic, relation to a context that seems to validate, which is to say, 'naturalize,' one denotation over another »³² (13). Autrement dit, le mot « piqué » devient un signifiant du seul signifié considéré comme normatif par la société. À ce stade, une signification du mot *voile* les autres, le lecteur glisse sur *l'autre sens*, parce qu'il ne parvient pas à le percevoir. Ici, le texte impose au lecteur de remarquer la différence contenue dans le caractère apparemment identique du graphème. La stratégie de lecture de l'*homographesis* « works to deconstruct »³³ (13) des lectures prescrites, non problématiques, car elle dévoile l'*altérité* inhérente dans le signifiant « identical »³⁴ ou « dissimilar »³⁵ (12-14). Comme Winfried Fluck le souligne, « the text [...] may reveal aspects of which the writer may have been only dimly aware or not yet aware at all, making literature a [...] potentially disruptive discourse »³⁶ (152).

C'est précisément ce double codage, la multiplicité des sens qui accorde à la fiction de Chopin en particulier, et à la fiction en général, son « special status as an *as if*-statement [that] allows the expression of culturally unacknowledged wishes and fears »³⁷ (152), puisque l'écriture créative est essentiellement un fantasme, un « désir qui trouve à se réaliser dans l'oeuvre littéraire » (Freud « La création littéraire » 9). En effet, pour Chopin,

The narrative organisation is often the main subversive instrument, with the surface meaning *apparently* conventional, [...] but actually [...] being undermined by the processes of revelation that have occurred throughout the text. (Beer 28).³⁸

C'est-à-dire que la façon dont les textes de Chopin fonctionnent est précisément l'*altérité dissemblable*, cette *différence identique* ou *double-codage* déjà mentionné. Autrement dit, ces textes appliquent directement la stratégie de

³¹ Aucune entité singulière

³² Se précipite dans une signification en vertu de son rapport linéaire, métonymique à un contexte qui semble valider, c'est à dire, « naturaliser », une dénotation plutôt qu'une autre

³³ Joue à déconstruire

³⁴ Identique

³⁵ Dissemblable

³⁶ Le texte [...] peut révéler des aspects desquels l'écrivain peut avoir été seulement vaguement au courant ou pas encore du tout, et qui font de la littérature un [...] discours potentiellement perturbateur

³⁷ Statut spécial, comme une affirmation en *comme si*, [qui] permet l'expression de désirs et de craintes culturellement non reconnues

³⁸ L'organisation narrative est souvent le principal instrument subversif, ayant un sens de surface *apparemment* conventionnel, [...] mais en réalité [...] mis à mal par les processus de révélation qui ont eu lieu dans tout le texte.

l'homographesis, par conséquent, il est logique de chercher des homographes révélant une structure profonde potentiellement subversive.

En ce qui concerne les désirs mentionnés, qui mènent et créent des récits sous forme de fantasmes, Freud distingue deux types des désirs qui motivent les fantasmes: ceux qui sont érotiques et ceux qui relèvent de l'ambition (« La création littéraire » 6). Et c'est précisément ce dualisme que les œuvres de Kate Chopin mettent en scène: comme l'affirme Fluck, elle « focused on the recurring themes of [...] social and sexual transgression »³⁹ (153). Toutefois, il semble évident, même sur la base de l'article de Joyce Dyer, que les trois histoires en question portent sur ce dernier domaine. Et s'il en est ainsi, il est tout à fait logique d'essayer de tester la possibilité de les lire comme des récits ayant pour thème une sexualité controversée, puisque l'on considère que le projet commun de la plupart de ses histoires est « crossing and violation of a border line which separates the realm of cultural norms from a tabooed, forbidden [...] area »⁴⁰ (Fluck 153-4). Cette interprétation se confirme d'autant plus si l'on se souvient que Pearl L. Brown définit l'histoire comme ayant au moins l'objectif de « explore male norms and departures from them »⁴¹ (70), et insiste sur le fait que Gouvernail montre « a discontent with the prevailing masculine order »⁴² (72) et qu'il est un personnage avec « ignored or repressed psychological needs »⁴³ (72).

Comme il a été montré ci-dessus, il y a un *homme féminin* dans le texte, qui est introduit par un autre homme d'une manière prédisposée et positivement préjugée. Qui plus est, cet homme féminin ne s'aperçoit même pas de la présence de la seule femme du texte, mais plutôt il se contente d'écouter attentivement l'autre pendant qu'il raconte ses histoires. Naturellement, Mme Baroda se sent blessée, par conséquent, elle leur permet de rester ensemble. Pas simplement « seuls », mais comme le texte l'indique clairement, « alone together » (Chopin 391, c'est moi qui souligne).

Naturellement, on pourrait à juste titre s'interroger ici sur la pertinence de la féminité comme caractéristique révélatrice d'une préférence sexuelle ou psychologique, différente de celle prévue. Évidemment, l'attraction entre hommes peut apparaître sous de nombreuses formes, et il n'y a pas vraiment de raison pour que l'une (ou aucune) des personnes impliquées puissent être « féminines » en aucune manière, ni que la féminité soit quelque chose qui conduise automatiquement à n'importe quel type de « manque » dans le cadre d'une masculinité hétérosexuelle. Toutefois, il ne faut pas oublier que c'est une histoire de la fin du XIX^{ème} siècle qui est en question ici. Et à la fin du XIX^{ème} siècle, l'un des modèles influents

³⁹ S'est concentrée sur les thèmes récurrents de [...] transgression sociale et sexuelle

⁴⁰ Le passage et la transgression d'une frontière qui sépare le domaine des normes culturelles d'une [...] zone tabouisée, interdite

⁴¹ Explorer les normes masculines et leurs digressions

⁴² Un mécontentement face à l'ordre masculin en cours

⁴³ Avec des besoins psychologiques ignorés ou refoulés

pour penser et discuter de l'attirance de même sexe, a été celui de *l'inverti*: « in German sexologist Karl Heinrich Ulrich's famous 1869 phrase, 'a female soul trapped in a man's body'; and, in the case of lesbian women, 'a male soul trapped in a woman's body' »⁴⁴ (Edwards 27). Donc, dans ce cadre prégnant à l'époque de Chopin, un homme attiré par les hommes est en effet un homme féminin.

Sur la base de tout cela, il semble logique pour moi de penser à un type complètement différent du triangle amoureux. Et c'est précisément la nature de ce triangle qui agace Mme Baroda. Elle a reconnu les signes de l'attirance non pas entre Gouvernail et elle-même, mais entre lui et son mari. Cette interprétation est également corroborée par le fait que Gouvernail parle de Gaston pendant qu'il est assis sur le banc à côté de Mme Baroda et sur « the old college days when he and Gaston *had been a good deal to each other* »⁴⁵ (Chopin 394) (c'est moi qui souligne). L'expression en italiques a une large gamme de connotations, et elle peut aussi susciter un sentiment fortement érotique. C'est également Gaston qui voulait revoir Gouvernail après son départ. Qui plus est, il a même « *greatly desired it* »⁴⁶ (396) (c'est moi qui souligne). Il est vrai que c'est Mme Baroda qui mentionne encore une fois, plus tard, cette possibilité, mais c'est Gaston qui « *was surprised and delighted with the suggestion coming from her* »⁴⁷ (396, c'est moi qui souligne). Sa déclaration affirmant qu'elle est d'accord sur tout et le rire l'accompagnant pourraient tout simplement se référer au fait qu'elle a réussi à surmonter le choc que la relation des deux hommes a provoqué en elle (cf. Freud « Humour » 425-34).

La citation de Whitman par Gouvernail et l'épisode du rendez-vous sur le banc, donnent peut-être l'argument central des lectures de Joyce Dyer et Patricia Hopkins Lattin. À ce stade, le texte se réfère directement à un autre, mais seulement d'une manière courte et fragmentaire. Mon interprétation se conforme partiellement à la leur parce qu'elle est d'accord avec l'affirmation selon laquelle les deux vers cités comportent leur contexte entier en eux-mêmes. Il est vrai aussi que la strophe 21 de *Song of Myself* de Whitman est remplie de connotations sexuelles.

Cependant, le symbolisme de cette strophe est intimement lié à la nature. L'air et le vent jouent un rôle très important en la matière. Les deux vers mêmes leur sont liés. Dans la petite histoire elle-même, cependant, c'est quand il écoute Gaston que Gouvernail avoue aimer la caresse du vent. Sa récitation est donc également une référence à ce fait. Comme preuve supplémentaire, bien que non concluante, on pourrait prendre en considération que dans la tradition symbolique, « of the four Elements, air and fire are regarded as [...] male »⁴⁸ (Cirlot) et aussi

⁴⁴ Dans la phrase célèbre de 1869 du sexologue allemand Heinrich Karl Ulrich, « une âme féminine piégée dans un corps d'homme », et, dans le cas des lesbiennes, « une âme masculine prise au piège dans un corps de femme »

⁴⁵ L'ancien temps au collège, quand lui et Gaston signifiaient beaucoup l'un pour l'autre

⁴⁶ Grandement désiré

⁴⁷ A été surpris et ravi que la proposition vienne d'elle

⁴⁸ Parmi les quatre éléments, l'air et le feu sont considérés comme [...] le sexe masculin

que le « wind is air in its active and violent aspects »⁴⁹ (Cirlot). C'est-à-dire que le vent du poème peut être évoqué par Gouvernail comme principe masculin, et, par substitution, comme Gaston lui-même. C'est lui qui le caresse, ou du moins il en éprouve le désir. De plus, le texte présente la preuve explicite qu'il n'a pas exposé la moindre de ces pensées à Mme Baroda: « this apostrophe to the night [...] was not addressed to her »⁵⁰ (Chopin 394). En conséquence, il est facile de reconnaître que « Gouvernail's silences and indifference seem hardly designed to attract [Mrs. Baroda] »⁵¹ (Beer 50).

Le point de vue de Joyce Dyer et Patricia Hopkins Lattin fait résider le contexte dans le texte de Whitman, avec la citation ; qui plus est, ils affirment que Gouvernail utilise les deux vers en ce sachant ce qu'il fait (Hopkins Lattin 32; Dyer 48). Cependant, le poème cité est narcissique, même dans son titre. Alors que le narcissisme est dans une certaine mesure présent en chacun et ne peut pas être considéré comme exclusivement homosexuel, du moins du point de vue psychanalytique, le narcissisme est néanmoins un de ces traits qui pourraient le signaler s'il est combiné avec d'autres traits. De l'avis de Freud, les homosexuels en général « se cherchent eux-mêmes comme objet d'amour, en présentant le type de choix d'objet qu'on peut nommer *narcissique* » (« Pour introduire le narcissisme »), même s'il faut reconnaître que « les deux voies menant au choix d'objet sont ouvertes à chaque être humain » (« Pour introduire le narcissisme »).

En outre, il est tout à fait bien connu que Walt Whitman ressentait lui-même une forte attraction pour les corps et les âmes masculins: « [c]ritics...who try to prove Whitman was fundamentally heterosexual have little to stand on »⁵² (Reynolds 490). Et, bien sûr, l'auteur ne peut pas être complètement séparé du texte, surtout si l'on tient seulement à une fonction foucauldienne de celui-ci. D'autant plus si l'on prétend, comme Dyer (48) et Hopkins Lattin (32), que Gouvernail utilise le texte de propos délibéré, étant parfaitement conscient de son contexte.

Il y a encore un problème avec Gouvernail appréciant le vent que l'on ne doit pas négliger. Dyer fait des commentaires sur cet épisode soulignant le caractère sensible de Gouvernail (48), puis immédiatement mentionnant que le « journalist even experiences pleasure from having the Barodas' enormous dogs rub against his legs »⁵³ (48). Cette expérience érotique liée au vent et à la campagne reflète fidèlement les vers qui sont exactement dans la continuité de ceux cités par Gouvernail. Comme Hopkins Lattin le souligne également, ces « lines appear in section 21 of 'Song of Myself,' in which the poet cries out for a union with the earth, sea, and the night – a union

⁴⁹ Le vent est l'air dans ses aspects actifs et violents

⁵⁰ Cette apostrophe à la nuit [...] ne lui a pas été adressée

⁵¹ Les silences et l'indifférence de Gouvernail ne semblent guère conçus pour attirer [Mme Baroda]

⁵² Les critiques [...] qui essaient de prouver que Whitman était fondamentalement hétérosexuel sont peu fondées

⁵³ Le journaliste éprouve même le plaisir d'avoir l'énorme chien des Baroda se « frotter » contre ses jambes

expressed in vivid sexual imagery »⁵⁴ (32). Cependant, alors que l'article du poème de Whitman célèbre en effet les éléments naturels, pour Gouvernail, ils ne semblent avoir de l'importance pour la seule raison qu'ils caressent son corps, restant ainsi plus proche du symbolisme de la partie 24 du même poème:

Sun so generous it shall be you!
 Vapors lighting and shading my face it shall be you!
 You sweaty brooks and dews it shall be you!
 Winds whose soft-tickling genitals rub against me it shall be you!⁵⁵ (Whitman 68)

C'est-à-dire, le contexte de Gouvernail appréciant la caresse et l'image des chiens se frottant, ainsi que l'utilisation de Whitman semblent plus susceptibles d'être une référence au poète « who is still there posturing, enjoying himself autoerotically »⁵⁶ (Fredrickson 143), qu'à « Whitman the mystic »⁵⁷ (143). Si, toutefois, ce qui se passe est un fantasme auto-érotique de Gouvernail, ou même, comme mentionné ci-dessus, s'il est lié quelques peu à Gaston, il est difficile de voir comment il pourrait viser le côté sensuel de Mme Baroda.

À ce stade, Dyer affirme que « Mrs. Baroda responds as if Whitman's lines were meant for her »⁵⁸ (49), ce qui est assez surprenant, pour plusieurs raisons. D'une part, il n'existe aucune preuve textuelle que Mme Baroda soit assez instruite ou intellectuelle pour savoir d'où ces vers viennent, sans parler du contexte qu'ils portent en eux-mêmes. D'autre part, nous serions face à un acte d'incompréhension en soi de la part de Mme Baroda, puisque, comme nous le savons, le poème ne lui a pas été adressé (Chopin 394).

En outre, la scène elle-même est très révélatrice si l'on est prêt à la soumettre à une lecture freudienne traditionnelle. Gouvernail, dans la nuit, est « the approaching red point of a lighted cigar »⁵⁹ (393), mais le cigare s'éteint et Gouvernail le laisse tomber dès qu'il s'approche de Mme Baroda. Considérant que les cigares, comme les objets de forme allongée, sont de type phallique (Freud *The Interpretation of Dreams*), le fait même qu'il soit allumé pourrait signifier la dissolution de la virilité seule,⁶⁰ alors que le laissant tomber en présence de Mme Baroda (Chopin 393), Gouvernail signale qu'il n'a pas besoin de sa virilité ou de son caractère phallique en sa présence.

⁵⁴ Les lignes apparaissent dans la partie 21 de « Song of Myself », dans laquelle le poète en appelle à une union avec la terre, la mer, et la nuit – union exprimée par une vive imagerie sexuelle

⁵⁵ Soleil si généreux ce sera vous! Vapeurs éclairant et ombrageant mon visage ce sera vous! Ruisseaux de sueurs et rosées ce sera vous! Vents dont les organes génitaux doux et chatouillant se frottent contre moi ce sera vous!

⁵⁶ Qui est toujours là en prenant des poses et du plaisir d'une manière auto-érotique

⁵⁷ Whitman, la mystique

⁵⁸ Mme Baroda répond comme si les vers de Whitman lui étaient destinés

⁵⁹ Le point rouge d'un cigare allumé s'approchant

⁶⁰ Ne pas reconnaître qu'il pourrait y avoir une connotation différente serait une simplification excessive. Un cigare peut aussi connoter l'excitation sexuelle.

Mme Baroda présente aussi des attributs symboliques révélateurs. D'une part, elle porte une robe blanche. Rappelant que, dans la littérature, « [c]lothing, as habit, implies a way of life »⁶¹ (Stallybrass and Jones 117), ce fait possède certainement ses connotations. Le blanc est la couleur de l'innocence (Protas et al.), de la pureté (Cirlot), donc il est probablement à même d'assumer le rôle de l'innocent dans l'histoire, Mme Baroda est donc innocente d'avoir des désirs « souillés » ; d'autant moins, si l'on tient compte du fait que le texte ne fait référence à aucun type de rencontre sexuelle entre les époux et qu'ils n'ont pas d'enfants. Le mot « innocence » pourrait également signifier, dans le contexte de l'histoire, la virginité.

Une autre pièce de tissu blanc apparaît dans le texte en référence à Mme Baroda: une écharpe. De l'avis du Dyer, on « cannot help but think that Gouvernail's gesture of offering Mrs. Baroda a white, filmy scarf to cover herself (a shawl, incidentally, that she lets lie in her lap) symbolizes the same kind of temporary veiling of passion and sex that we later see by his crucial Whitman omission »⁶² (49). L'innocente blancheur de Mme Baroda mentionnée ci-dessus, ajoutée au fait qu'elle « accepted the scarf from him with a murmur of thanks, and let it lie in her lap »⁶³ (Chopin 394), peut également être interprétée pour apporter un soutien supplémentaire, ou même renforcer l'interprétation du personnage de Mme Baroda comme une possible vierge, du moins pure et innocente de caractère. On peut en dire autant du foulard, comme un voile étendu sur ses genoux, rappelant l'hymen, au même titre que la « belt or girdle is a symbol of the protection of the body and [...] an allegory of virginity »⁶⁴ (Cirlot) même en eux-mêmes, et plus encore sur les genoux de Mme Baroda.

Son mari qui l'appelle « chère amie » (Chopin 396) est tout aussi susceptible de se référer à l'amitié dans son sens moderne qu'à n'importe quel type possible d'attraction sexuelle. Qui plus est, il l'utilise dans un contexte qui mériterait certainement un adjectif beaucoup plus fort s'il est utilisé entre deux amants: « I am glad, chère amie, to know that you have finally overcome your dislike for him; truly he did not deserve it »⁶⁵ (396).

Par conséquent, on peut postuler que le triangle amoureux inhérent dans le texte n'a pas évolué avec l'apparition de Gouvernail à la propriété Baroda. Au contraire, la relation entre Gaston et Gouvernail est plus ancienne que la connaissance de Gaston et Mme Baroda. Ce n'est pas par hasard que j'emploie le mot « connaissance » : une amitié profonde semble beaucoup plus probable entre eux que tout autre genre de désir.

⁶¹ Un vêtement, comme un habit, implique une façon de vivre

⁶² Ne peut s'empêcher de penser que le geste de Gouvernail offrant à Mme Baroda une écharpe blanche et transparente afin qu'elle se couvre (un châle, d'ailleurs, qu'elle pose sur ses genoux) symbolise le même genre de voile éphémère de la passion et du sexe que nous voyons ensuite dans son omission cruciale de Whitman

⁶³ Elle a accepté l'écharpe de sa part avec un murmure de grâce, et le laisse sur ses genoux

⁶⁴ La ceinture ou la gaine symbolise la protection du corps et [...] une allégorie de la virginité

⁶⁵ Je suis heureux, chère amie, de savoir que vous avez finalement surmonté votre aversion envers lui; il ne la méritait vraiment pas

À ce stade, il pourrait être une bonne idée de s'arrêter une minute et tenter de comprendre le comportement de Gaston Baroda, puisque le reste de cette analyse a essentiellement porté sur Gouvernail et Mme Baroda. Comme il a été souligné ci-dessus, le point de vue de Gouvernail est polarisé, et sa relation avec sa femme est plus conviviale qu'amoureuse. En outre, il semble aimer de nombreux sports, comme la pêche et chasser les grosbecs (391), et il paraît être attaché à sa plantation, donc il semble de toute façon être le prototype du propriétaire de plantations du Sud sûr de lui-même.

Appliquer tout cela à l'image des relations entre les trois personnages de l'histoire n'est pas si difficile, une fois que l'on considère deux choses. La première est que, prenant en considération le modèle d'inversion de l'attraction du même sexe, si Gouvernail est un homme féminin, son partenaire doit, par conséquent, être masculin, puisque « the inversion model implies that one half of every male–male couple would always 'be the man' and presumably act butch [...] and one would always 'be the woman' and presumably act femme »⁶⁶ (Edwards 27). C'est-à-dire, en tant qu'homme censé avoir une sorte de relation avec Gouvernail, le comportement masculin et d'auto-affirmation de Gaston est celui attendu dans sa situation par les contemporains. La seconde en est que Gaston Baroda ne vient pas de la même classe sociale que Gouvernail, donc, il y a des attentes différentes et donc différents modèles de comportement possibles qui lui sont liés. Bien que son statut et sa richesse matérielle lui permettent d'avoir un milieu plus sûr que Gouvernail puisse rêver, pourtant, « on leaving school, many such men seemed also to have identified same-sex eroticism with childishness and, consequently, as a mark of powerlessness »⁶⁷ (25), et ainsi ils ont ceci de réprimé, ayant plutôt adopté le récit d'une vie prévue, car, bien qu'un « [Creole] man's social status was defined primarily by his work and only secondarily by his marital status »⁶⁸ (Brown 73), il a néanmoins été « expected at some point in his life to assume his proper role as the patriarchal head of a household »⁶⁹ (73). Cela pourrait être l'autre raison pour le mariage de Gaston et pour le fait qu'il agit ultérieurement tel le prototype du propriétaire de la plantation du Sud.

Peu importent les raisons du comportement de Gaston, le désir caché entre Gouvernail et Gaston Baroda jette une lumière nouvelle sur le titre. Il n'est plus question de savoir si la bonne réputation de Mme Baroda est ou non mise en question. Ni de discuter sur la lutte entre ses désirs ou sur les attentes de la société. Mme Baroda devient respectable à la fin du texte. Le triangle amoureux normatif et

⁶⁶ Le modèle d'inversion implique qu'une moitié de chaque couple mâle-mâle serait toujours « l'homme » et agirait vraisemblablement en *butch* [...] et l'autre serait toujours « la femme » et agirait vraisemblablement en *femme*

⁶⁷ Ayant terminé les études, beaucoup d'hommes de ce genre semblaient également avoir identifié l'érotisme du même sexe comme un enfantillage et, par conséquent, comme une marque d'impuissance

⁶⁸ Le statut social d'un homme créole était défini principalement par son travail et seulement en second lieu par son état matrimonial

⁶⁹ Attendu qu'à un moment donné de sa vie il assume son propre rôle de chef de ménage patriarcal

attendu en voile un autre, celui où Gouvernail et Gaston enfreignent l'union hétérosexuelle du mariage et où la relation entre Gouvernail et Mme Baroda reste vierge. Ainsi, elle devient une personne à regarder, à respecter, car elle accepte l'altérité: même le passé de son propre mari guette et émerge. C'est-à-dire, elle ne sera plus conforme à *l'hétérosexualité obligatoire*, même si c'est ce que la structure de surface de l'histoire nous amènerait à supposer. Au contraire, elle est subversive et, en même temps, souple et généreuse. Ces aspects s'harmonisent avec la paraphrase écrite par Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick sur la compréhension des triangles amoureux de René Girard, où elle souligne que, voilés derrière des triangles amoureux hétérosexuels, on en trouve souvent des homosexuels, ou du moins des homosociaux (Sedgwick 478-479).

Ainsi, on peut voir que, comme il a été proposé, il est en effet utile d'examiner les textes de Kate Chopin dans une perspective *queer*, et que le personnage de Gouvernail peut être lu différemment de la façon dont on l'entend habituellement. Bien que l'histoire traite en effet d'un triangle amoureux, tout comme réclamé par Dyer et Hopkins Lattin, ce triangle est beaucoup plus controversé et subversif que postulé par chacun d'entre eux. Il est également intéressant de noter que cette expérience dans une lecture *queer* d'un texte de Kate Chopin pourrait aussi être considérée comme un indicateur de la possibilité générale d'une telle entreprise, et pourrait donc servir à valider le concept. En fait, on pourrait souligner qu'il peut y avoir beaucoup plus que la courte fiction sur l'auteur généralement reconnu dans les critiques qui se concentrent principalement, et peut-être un peu trop, sur *L'éveil*.

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WOMEN WRITERS IN GEORGE CĂLINESCU'S LITERARY CRITICISM

MAGDA WÄCHTER¹

ABSTRACT. “*Women Writers in George Călinescu’s Literary Criticism*”. This study analyses George Călinescu’s perspective on feminine literature, as expressed by the critic both in his monumental *History of Romanian Literature from its Origins to the Present*, first published in 1941, and in other critical texts. His opinions on this subject, very suggestive for the critic’s general approach, may be also relevant for the historical and cultural frame of his epoch. As they appear in several reviews, essays, and aesthetic studies, they also provide an interesting perspective of the typical image of women in Romanian literature, as compared to other literatures. Without referring to all of Călinescu’s studies and articles dedicated to women’s literary works, the study points to the main ideas that reveal the author’s general view on this subject.

Keywords: feminine, criticism, Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, physiological, moral

REZUMAT. „*Literatura feminină în viziunea critică a lui George Călinescu*”. Prezentul studiu analizează perspectiva lui George Călinescu asupra literaturii feminine, expusă atât în monumentală *Istorie a literaturii române de la origini până în prezent*, publicată inițial în 1941, cât și în alte texte critice. Opiniile criticului pe marginea acestui subiect, foarte sugestive pentru întreaga sa viziune, sunt relevante și pentru cadrul istoric și cultural al epocii. Fără a face referire la toate studiile și articolele lui Călinescu dedicate operelor literare feminine, studiul prezintă principalele coordonate ce relevă viziunea de ansamblu a autorului asupra acestui subiect.

Cuvinte cheie: feminin, critică, Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, fiziologic, moral.

George Călinescu (1899-1965), the founder of Romanian artistic literary criticism, is a complex, protean writer, whose original spirit is fully revealed both

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in his famous *History of Romanian Literature from its Origins to the Present* and in other theoretical and fictional works. His critical method, marked by an impressionistic, artistic perspective, illustrates his aesthetic view, pleading for literary history as an ineffable science, based on aesthetic criteria, as well as for an analytic approach substantially similar to artistic creation itself. In Călinescu's opinion, literary criticism is a matter of vocation, like any other art; the literary historian must be a critic and the critic an artist, a creator, in the real meaning of the word. Consequently, the critic's ideas have a personal frame and become, to a certain extent, the portrait of his preferences and ideals. In this context, objectivity in criticism is, first of all, the objectivity of a subjectivity which analyses itself, contemplating virtual aspects of its own in the different mirrors of various artistic works. Călinescu's *History of Romanian Literature* is, according to the author, a "human comedy", a stage with writers exceptionally portrayed in concise, suggestive expressions, with a remarkable, yet not infallible critical eye.

Women writers' contribution to this "human comedy", though less substantial than the male writers' one, is obviously discussed by Călinescu in the same critical spirit. In his studies dedicated to women writers, positive as well as negative opinions are expressed; some of them are much appreciated, others are barely mentioned for pure historiographic reasons, whereas a few are severely criticized. In fact, the critic's literary texts on male writers follow the same pattern. Therefore, the question is whether any distinction between feminine and masculine literature, as viewed in Călinescu's criticism, should be made, at all. In this respect, the author provides a definite answer, while mentioning himself certain differences between feminine literature and the so-called "virile" one. In several essays and studies, as well as in the *History of Romanian Literature*, the critic attempts to emphasize characteristics of feminine writing and approaches such subjects as women's creative and critical abilities and their possible contribution to culture, art and society. Some of these problems are obviously superseded and confined to a certain philosophical frame of misogynist influence, although the critic repeatedly pronounces himself against misogyny and even praises such Romanian writers as Ion Heliade-Rădulescu and Cezar Bolliac, who plead for the equality between men and women as far back as the nineteenth century. In his critical approach to literary works belonging to women writers, he openly states the necessity of an objective judgment, free from any cultural or social prejudices. On the other hand, if the work discussed inspires or incites him, the verb becomes passionate and emotionally coloured.

Here is an example of such an "objective" analysis dedicated to a novel written by Anișoara Odeanu (1912-1972): *Being a woman after all, Miss Anișoara Odeanu put on the cover of the volume a picture of hers, by which we become acquainted with a licked pussy cat face, with jocular, piercingly malicious, though actually childish eyes, with a bold nose above a mouth which, despite the thick "rouge" of the most fatal ones, keeps being amusingly innocent, finally, a face of a*

graceful masculine terribleness, yet mobile enough to give the impression of being ready to disappear from the cover, in order to sob on a pillow because of the bitterly malicious criticism."²(2006, 718).

The analysis of the novel starts not only from its inclusion to feminine literature, but even the author's picture on the cover of the book reveals a certain critical malice ironically suggested by Călinescu himself. Nevertheless, this is also an illustrative sample of his critical approach, which usually starts from a simple impression gradually growing substantial and finally becoming essential, as the very original mark of the work discussed. Referring to Anișoara Odeanu, the critic suggests a similitude between her facial expression and the emblem of her writing, namely ingenuity.

Condescending irony is also present in some of G.Călinescu's sketches on feminine writing in the *History of Romanian Literature*: "*Matilda Cugler's poetry is decent like an angel with praying hands. It is a poetry for boarding school albums, with little birds and tiny butterflies, decently proper for young ladies watched by governesses*"³(1982, 422).

Still, the critic is equally ironical or malicious in his analyses dedicated to the so-called "virile" literary works. Neither condescension nor irony should necessarily come from prejudices related to feminine writing, so far. More surprising is that Calinescu seems to identify a certain feminine art and style and that he even mentions a presumptively suitable or unsuitable language in women's writing. In his view, this feminine style in both poetry and prose implies a certain discretion and gentleness. Moreover, any objective note in feminine writing is identified with amazement. G.Călinescu is surprised even by "*a woman's ability to taste phonetical savour*", in the text about Georgeta Mircea Cancicov (1982, 934). He appreciates Profira Sadoveanu(1906-2003), the daughter of Mihail Sadoveanu, for her language, which is "*decently suitable for a woman and especially for a very young one*"(2007, 694).

Therefore, we may presume the existence of a feminine expression code, of certain stylistic and lexical standards, rather suggested than clearly defined by the critic. Feminine writing, just like feminine behavior, is supposed to obey some rules and expressive taboos, primarily decency. Any violation of these rules is considered disgusting. An example of disobedience is a novel by Lucia Demetrius (1910-1992),

² Fiind în definitiv femeie, d-ra Anișoara Odeanu și-a pus pe coperta volumului o fotografie a chipului său, prin care luăm cunoștință de un cap de pisicuță linsă, cu ochi șagalnici, sfredelitori de maliție, deși în fond copilăroși, cu nas temerar deasupra unei guri care, în ciuda unui „rouge” gros dintre cele mai fatale, rămâne de o amuzantă inocență, un chip în sfârșit de o grațioasă teribilitate masculinizantă care îți face impresia însă prin mobilitatea lui că e gata să dispară de pe copertă spre a sughița cu lacrimi într-o pernă, de amarul criticei răutăcioase.

³ "Poezia Matildei Cugler este decentă ca un înger cu mâinile împreunate. E o poezie pentru albumuri de pensioane, cu păsărici, fluturași, la modul cuviincios al domnișoarelor supravegheate de guvernante."

stigmatized by the critic for its presumed frivolity. Scandalized at the author's courage to explicitly depict erotic images, G.Călinescu becomes extremely reticent to women's writing in general, for rather whimsical reasons. Here is the beginning of his review: "*Le Brun, a French man of letters in the seventeenth century, is told to have made women the following suggestion (we quote Sainte-Beuve): < Inspirez, mais n'écrivez pas. > We might not be mistaken if making the same suggestion to Romanian women. Feminine literature is, in most of the cases, mediocre, of a particular mediocrity, which dulls the high idea we have about women. This literature is either insipid and moralizing, inclined to exalt the trifling values of life or vulgarly sensual. Nevertheless, in criticism we cannot start from a priori statements. Virile literature itself is now so low that the question is whether women might not possibly follow the general platitude. On the other hand, there are also women of undeniable talent. But one thing must be noticed. A masculine unsuccessful attempt does not disqualify the author whom we might consider capable of many other undertakings. But a feminine unsuccessful attempt is embarrassing.*"⁴ (2007, 1446).

Obviously guided by personal extra-literary prejudices, G.Călinescu suggests that writing is a very venturesome act for a woman, who therefore risks losing her personal mystery and irremediably disappoint in case of possible failure. As far as feminine writing is concerned, literary success depends on the correct choice of the subject and style and, most of all, on a certain shyness and gentleness in expression and attitude. As to Lucia Demetrius' novel, the critic's negative remarks are numerous: platitude, mimicry, lack of literary vocation, fastidiousness etc. But only one of them is essential, namely concupiscence. Călinescu admits that eroticism is not unliterary in itself, Boccaccio's prose is a famous example. It is just inappropriate for a woman writer. "*Two young lovers, found naked, in some short story by Boccaccio, are not vulgar, since the loss of any sense of prudence and convenience is the characteristics of the juvenile erotic crisis. But to hear a woman lucidly <analyzing> her love, reducing it to some libidinous images is embarrassing, painfully embarrassing*"⁵(2007, 1449).

⁴ *Le Brun, literat francez din sec. al XVIII-lea, ar fi făcut femeilor (citam după Sainte-Beuve) următoarea recomandare:*

"*Inspirez, mais n'écrivez pas.*" Poate că n-ar fi nepotrivit să facem și noi această recomandare femeilor române. Literatura feminină este de cele mai multe ori mediocră, de o mediocritate specială, care întunecă ideea înaltă pe care noi ne-o facem despre femeie. Această literatură este ori plată și moralizantă, înclinată a exalta valorile mărunte ale vieții ori în chip trivial senzuală. Totuși în critică nu putem porni de la propoziții apriori. Și literatura virilă este acum atât de coborâtă încât e întrebarea dacă și femeia nu urmează plătudinea generală. Și apoi sunt și femei de talent incontestabil. Dar un lucru trebuie observat. O încercare bărbătească neizbutită nu descalifică pe un autor pe care-l putem socoti capabil de multe alte întreprinderi. O încercare feminină neizbutită este însă penibilă.

⁵ Doi tineri îndrăgostiți, găsiți goi, în cutare nuvelă a lui Boccaccio nu sunt triviali, întrucât pierderea oricărui simț de prudență și conveniență este caracteristica crizei erotice juvenile. Dar să auzi o femeie „analizându-și” lucid dragostea, reducând-o la niște imagini de libidine, e penibil, e dureros de penibil.

G.Călinescu's concludes that Lucia Demetrius' lucid analysis of eroticism is odious and her novel disgusting. This is, in fact, his most disapproving study about feminine literature. On the other hand, most women authors studied by the critic do not attempt to scandalize or even innovate literary art. They rather keep within the limits of domestic subjects, as Călinescu ironically notices himself.

Thus, so far we have a style, a language, a moral frame presumptively characteristic of feminine literary art, as well as a particular subject area, mostly restricted to the problem of the woman. In a literary review dedicated to a novel by Lucreția Petrescu (1883-1939), the critic rhetorically wonders whether a woman is even able to approach other subjects than the feminine ones: "*Mrs. Lucreția Petrescu's novel is constructed skillfully enough, it is read with interest, but it reveals no artistic faculty. This was not absolutely necessary here, as a matter of fact. It is a novel which, keeping objective, does not yet shrink from approaching problems. And what problems may a woman approach but the feminist ones? We are told about a woman who is put in all those circumstances supposedly in order to provide the reader with notions about a woman's destiny in modern society*"⁶(2007, 882).

Furthermore, in his study about Henriette Yvonne Stahl (1900-1984), the critic seems to identify the specific of feminine literature with the subject approached. "*Henriette Yvonne Stahl's literature is feminine since it discreetly relies on the problem of woman's happiness*"⁷(1982, 742).

According to this argument, G.Călinescu, as a novel writer, may belong to feminine literature himself, like many other men creators of memorable women characters.

In other studies, the author attempts to identify the particular mark of feminine writing not within the subjects of fictional works, but in a presumptive feminine perspective on the world, in general. The critic mentions an important distinction between the feminine existential paradigm and the masculine one. The feminine cognitive outlook would be characterized by primary, physiological perception of immanence, whereas masculine cognition aims at transcendence. Reflecting on some literary works, George Călinescu comes to general ideas with ontological implications; in these cases, literature becomes a simple pretext for either a psychological approach or direct confession revealing rather a portrait of the author than of the work discussed. An example of such an interpretation is the study in the *History of Romanian Literature* dedicated to Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu (1876-1955), probably the most respected and largely commented, though not much

⁶ Romanul d-nei Lucreția Petrescu este întocmit cu suficientă îndemânare, se citește cu interes, fără să dezvăluie nicio facultate artistică. Nici nu era aici de neapărată nevoie. Este un roman care, păstrând obiectivitatea, nu se sfiște totuși să atace și probleme. Și ce probleme poate să atace o femeie decât cele feministe? Ni se vorbește dar de o femeie care e pusă în toate acele circumstanțe din care pot să rezulte pentru cititor noțiuni despre destinul unei femei în societatea modernă.

⁷ Literatura Henriettei Stahl este feminină întrucât se sprijină în chip discret pe problema fericirii femeii.

enjoyed woman author in the whole of Călinescu's works. This study is also illustrative for the critic's perspective which alternates between objectivity and subjectivity, documentary information and personal confession, direct verdicts and subtle interpretations of details.

From the very beginning, the author states his intention to be objective, free from any prejudices, as well as equidistant to the contradictory opinions expressed by other commentators. The positive and the negative reactions already existing seem equally correct to Călinescu, who considers that Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu's prose is composed both by pages suggesting possible profoundness and inspiring enthusiasm "*by what we think they might accomplish*", and by totally arid, disappointing pages. This very inequality in her early writings has a certain "*aesthetic importance*", the critic briefly noticed, but he becomes very reserved a few lines below: "*The author is rather an amateur, without free aesthetic consciousness, probably, judging by her whole work, without any notion of art, an amateur who feels like writing and puts down on the paper anything that crosses her mind and mostly her senses. But this woman's mind is intelligent and her senses are refined, so that in the heap of sentences some word very often happens to be remarkable*"⁸(1982, 737).

The conclusion is that the value of Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu's literary works consists in the possible artistic effects of the relationship between achievements and failures, i.e. in pure virtuality, except for some minor lexical skills revealed so far. The novels and stories Călinescu refers to are considered interesting as simple documents of the feminine soul. Their main shortcoming seems to be their very belonging to feminine literature, which implies a limited background in terms of both existential and artistic values. Analysing Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu's novels, the critic creates an interesting theory on feminine literature, based on several ideas previously asserted in some other articles. The first characteristics of feminine writing would come from women's lack of interest in idealism: "*Used to transcendence via virile poetry, woman being placed within a metaphysical halo, the reader also looks, within feminine literature, for abstraction movements. But Beatrice is the product of a masculine mind, bound to earth by her physiology, the woman does not think of herself as Beatrice and does not have the heavenly ascending vocation. She is constantly concerned about her relationship to man and procreation. Her thinking is totally practical, consequently restricted to the emotional area.[...] Woman lives in society, being a producer of individuals herself. This is why feminine literature has two aspects which may be easily reduced to unity: there are women of the moral type, who sing their love for children, domestic and civic virtues, as well as love as an institution, more seldom*

⁸ Autoarea e mai mult o amatoare, fără o conștiință estetică liberă, probabil, judecând după toată opera, fără nici o noțiune de artă, căreia îi vine să scrie și care pune pe hârtie tot ce-i trece prin cap și mai ales prin simțuri. Însă capul acestei femei este inteligent, iar simțurile îi sunt rafinate, încât în maldărul de fraze un cuvânt e foarte adesea remarcabil.

the country, since the latter is an ideal construction, sometimes dangerous for the lives of her children, contrary to her selfish motherly feeling. Also, there are women of the pure physiological type, such as the Countess of Noailles, who openly sing the desire for copulation, the aspiration of being loved by man and the joy of living sensuously"⁹(1982, 737-738).

Identifying feminine typology with the artistic markers of feminine writing, the critic classifies women's literature into moral and psychological literature, in opposition with the masculine creation, usually placed in a metaphysical, idealistic background. From this point of view, the former is a minor form, a simple expression of the material world, sensually and emotionally perceived, deprived from any transcendental outlook. In George Călinescu's view, most of the women authors analysed in the *History of Romanian Literature* illustrate a physiological artistic perspective characterized either by vitalism or by sentimentalism. The critic does not change his opinions at all, although the number of women writers increases substantially in the following decades of the twentieth century. Among the women authors Călinescu commented upon, Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu maintains her privileged position.

Referring again to the main literary achievement of the novelist Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, Călinescu considers, in the *History of Romanian Literature*, that this is the superior juxtaposition of the two types of feminine literature mentioned above. Typically to a woman writer, Papadat-Bengescu's main interests rely on the sensuous, domestic and social life, whereas general ideas and symbols are totally absent. The result would be an obvious platitude, noticed by the critic with openly confessed "virile prejudices". Nevertheless, this very platitude is considered the aesthetic original mark of Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu's writings. As an admirer of classicism and of the objective perspective in prose, Călinescu thinks that the lacking experience Romanian novelist is tempted to idealize the world and thus, miss the objective, realistic view proper to the novel. Consequently, Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu's feminine gift to depict the earthly values and deal with social life is convenient in the context of Romanian literature.

To conclude, the novelist Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu is appreciated, on the one hand, for her virtual gifts and, on the other, for the shortcomings of her writing

⁹ Obişnuit de poezia virilă cu transcendența, cu așezarea femeii într-o aureolă metafizică, cititorul caută și în literatura femeilor mișcările de abstragere. Însă Beatrice e produsul unei minți bărbătești. Femeia, legată de pământ prin fiziologia ei, nu se simte Beatrice, nu are vocația conducerii spre cer. Ea e stăpânită mereu de problema raporturilor cu bărbatul și a procreației. Gândirea ei este total practică, prin urmare din câmpul sentimentului.[...] O femeie trăiește în societate, ea însăși fiind producătoare de indivizi. De aceea literatura feminină are două aspecte ce se pot reduce ușor la unitate: sunt femeile de tipul moral, care cântă iubirea de copii, virtuțile casnice și civice și dragostea ca o instituție, mai rar însă patria, aceasta fiind o idealitate, uneori primejdioasă pentru viața copiilor, contra sentimentului egoist de mamă; sunt în sfârșit femeile de tipul curat fiziologic, cum era Contesa de Noailles, care cântă fără acoperământ dorința de împreunare, aspirația de a fi iubită de bărbat și bucuria de a trăi trupește.

which are definitely approved of as a positive example in a negative context. Further on, the critic will repeat and emphasize the same ideas meant to characterize feminine literature: in Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu's novels, most of the characters are women; their concerns are mostly physiological and social; the action is almost completely replaced by women talk, visits and gossip, in an impossible female-language. In other words, the author cultivates a feminine novel of terrestrial aspirations. Yet, the critic's conclusion, expressed quite ironically and paradoxically, is a positive one: "*The way she is, H.P.-Bengescu has yet the structure of a great writer and deserves a high position in the critics' esteem, not for her achievements, quite impure sometimes, but for the perspective on which she relies her observation, and for her theoretical aesthetic level*"¹⁰ (1982, 742).

G.Călinescu's reticence on feminine literature, as revealed in the study dedicated to Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, is even more clearly articulated in some of his articles referring to this matter and in the context of some cultural debates on the position of women in art and society.

Invited to deliver a speech about the perception of women in Romanian contemporary literature, the critic confesses being skeptical, since women hardly exist in our literature, in his opinion. His substantial speech, published under the title of *The Romanian Woman's Mission*, is fully relevant for his ideas about women writers and women characters, whose common characteristics would be the very problem of woman, specifically distinguished from man as far as their psychological and intellectual structure are concerned. The reader's conception may be summed up as follows: woman is a material, social and artificial human being whose main concern is to be loved and mastered by man. The latter is transcendental, while the former is terrestrial; man has a basically metaphysical consciousness, whereas woman has an empirical one. That is why, woman's vocation in art and literature is questionable. As a practical spirit, she may be gifted only for decorative arts, while symbolic arts, especially music, are much above her natural limits. Not being musical, she cannot be lyrical either. Therefore, feminine poetry is always sensual, biological, vitalistic. Among the literary species, the most suitable one for women writers seems to be the novel, which gives the illusion of the immediate world. Still, the feminine novel is rather a kind of biological, vaporous, sensual lyricism. As far as literary criticism is concerned, this is also beyond the abilities of women who do not possess an analytical spirit. In George Călinescu's opinion, the emancipation of women, as well as their possible contribution to the civic and the cultural life, is rather impossible. In fact, the critic's point is that the real mission of women is not creating, but stimulating and inspiring the male-creators: "*The Romanian woman's mission in life and art is to*

¹⁰ Așa cum este, H-a P.-Bengescu are totuși structura mării scriitoare și merită să ocupe un loc de frunte în stima criticeii, nu pentru realizări, uneori impure, ci pentru unghiul de la care își pornește observația, pentru nivelul estetic teoretic.

interest man, to raise him to a high conception on woman's value, to give him the notion of some other eroticism"¹¹ (1985, 96).

In this context, Călinescu deplores the lack of memorable feminine characters in Romanian literature, caused by the indifference of the Romanian people to women who are appreciated only as working hands and labour mates, whereas in French culture, which invests them with the symbolical and mystical values, they are able to inspire great creations. This attitude has two sources, according to the critic, namely a rural and an oriental one.

Similar ideas are also stated in other studies and reviews, where Călinescu analyses the image of women as depicted in Romanian literature. In a review of G.A.Borgese's work, entitled *Il senso della letteratura italiana* (Milano, Treves, 1931), the critic characterizes the Romanian writers' perception of women in a suggestive way, combining idealism with elements of pamphlet: "*Woman is at the same level as the procreating animal, without any raffaelization, without any theological amplitude. She does not <redeem> anyone, she does not offer paradises, she is just a <weak-minded woman>. The Romanian does not feel any respect for the woman yet, neither does he raise her to the religious idea of the Holy Virgin, nor to the French level as the representative of an inner culture. Woman holds a modest place beside the labour cattle*"¹² (1985, 225).

Călinescu repeatedly repudiates misogyny, as well as limited, vulgarizing conceptions on women belonging to most of the Romanian writers. He deplores the prejudices extant in Romanian culture and civilization and pleads for the ennoblement and spiritualization of women, following the model of the great European cultures. Yet, his views are tributary to similar prejudices, even if he criticizes the rural and oriental Romanian misogyny. In one of his aesthetic studies, the critic himself deprives women of any elevated theoretical consciousness, of the faculty of dialectical thinking and even of elementary reflexive abilities: "*A woman reconsidering the bases of knowledge like Im[manuel] Kant, who proceeds to the ideal reconstruction of the world, in one word, a female- philosopher, makes a strange impression. If we can easily imagine Ovid dreamily contemplating the waves of Pontus Euxinus, a woman in the same reflecting position seems grotesque to us. While Ovid contemplates the dying waves, it is only natural that woman should contemplate Ovid*"¹³ (1990, 156).

¹¹ Rostul femeii române în viață și în artă e de a interesa pe bărbat, a-l ridica la o concepție înaltă despre valoarea femeii, a-i da noțiunea unei alte erotice.

¹² Femeia rămâne la nivelul animalului procreator, însă fără raffaelizare, fără amplitudine teologală. Ea nu „mântuiește” pe nimeni, nu oferă paradisuri, e „femeie slabă de minte”. Românul nu are încă respect pentru femeie, pe care n-o ridică nici la ideea religioasă a Sacrei Fecioare, nici la treapta franceză a exponenței unei culturi interioare. Femeia ocupă un loc modest alături de vitele de muncă.

¹³ O femeie care reexaminează ca Im. Kant bazele cunoașterii, care trece la reconstrucția ideală a lumii, într-un cuvânt o filozoafă, ne face o impresie stranie. Dacă ne reprezentăm cu ușurință pe Ovidiu contemplând visător valurile Pontului Euxin, ni se pare grotescă o femeie în aceeași postură cogibundă. Firește este ca, în timp ce Ovidiu privește moartea valurilor, femeia să privească pe Ovid.

If man is basically theoretical and woman practical, if she is only materially and socially guided, with no will of her own and no elevated affective life, as George Călinescu thinks, it is obvious that feminine artistic creation could be only accidental and minor. In fact, the critic does not plead for the emancipation of women and does not believe in women's creative spirit. He only advises creative men to change their image about inspiring women, as objects and not as subjects of creation. In his opinion, the spiritualization and even the idealization of this image may improve the Romanian writer's aesthetic conception and thus, contribute to the synchronization of Romanian literature with world literature.

Consequently, Călinescu's concern for women authors' literary works is both a confirmation and a denial of his "virile prejudices", already confessed as such. There are female authored works that fit his theories on women's writing, but, paradoxically, their artistic value is given by their lack of artistry, as in the case of Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu. On the other hand, there are also literary works that refute the critic's prejudices, such as the Countess of Noailles's metaphysical poetry. Some of the female authored artistic works are labeled as scandalizing because of their subject and lexical insolence. Such are Lucia Demetrius' novels. On the other hand, other female-authored works are praised for the very feminine character of their topic and style.

George Călinescu's "human comedy" is so various that it hardly resists the prejudices and the conceptual barriers set by the theoretician himself. The critic's perspective on Romanian literature, either male or female authored, is vivid, original, and subjective. It is open to the most different interpretations. As far as feminine literary art is concerned, it offers a relevant image of the cultural frame of the epoch, characterized by an open confrontation between the theoretical debates and the actual literary achievements.

Conclusion

Quite skeptical about women's writing, George Călinescu looked upon it with "virile prejudices. He approaches women's literature both theoretically and concretely, in several studies and reviews dedicated to female authored literary works. In this respect, his opinions which can be deduced either from his wide aesthetic perspective, as well as from brief direct confessions, represent an important starting point for further similar discussions, possibly leading to a history of Romanian women writers as viewed by Romanian literary critics.

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FACTUAL AND FIGURAL: ON DANIEL MENDELSON'S *THE LOST*

MIRCEA CRĂCIUN*

ABSTRACT. *Factual and Figural: On Daniel Mendelsohn's The Lost.* My intention here is to point out some of the inexhaustible hermeneutical possibilities engendered by a masterpiece that, to my knowledge, is hardly known to the Romanian readers, except, perhaps, for academic circles. Mendelsohn's novel, *The Lost*, is a palimpsest account of an abominable family saga with which Truman Capote's famous concoction "the non-fiction novel" is transgressed in a brilliant intertextual game between factual and figural.

Keywords: Jewishness, Holocaust, World War II, Torah, Family Tree, Intertextuality, Hypertext.

REZUMAT. *Faptic și figural. Despre romanul The Lost de Daniel Mendelsohn.* Intenția studiului de față este aceea de a evidenția câteva dintre nelimitatele posibilități hermeneutice oferite de o capodoperă care, considerăm, este cvasi-necunoscută cititorilor din România, exceptând, probabil, cercurile academice. Romanul lui Mendelsohn, *The Lost*, ne prezintă o abominabilă saga familială, tălmăcită ca un palimpsest, în care faimoasa expresie a lui Truman Capote, "romanul non-ficțiune", este depășită prin genialul joc intertextual dintre faptic și figural.

Cuvinte-cheie: identitate evreiască, Holocaust, Al Doilea Război Mondial, Tora, arbore genealogic, intertextualitate, hipertext.

The appearance, after so many metaphysical, fictional, or genuine deaths of Daniel Mendelsohn's *The Lost* (2006) marks, in my opinion, a remarkable achievement in the, however hazy, post-postmodernist paradigms. It trespasses the aporetic character of morality as well as some narrative patterns that have become clichés.

The author's note: "The events recorded in this book are true. All formal interviews were recorded on video tapes and, nearly all the conversations...were either recorder by the author or reconstructed on the basis of notes taken by the

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author during these conversations”¹ is ironical. It recalls Truman Capote’s (sometimes aided by Harper Lee and Rebecca West) naïve claim to the invention of a “new literary form” that was baptised “a non-fictional novel” - a novel purged of the authorial voice, based on journalism and reportage. With reference to his *Cold Blood*, Capote states that he has used “all the techniques of fictional art”, but the novel was “immaculately factual” an “editing job”. However, Capote significantly adds that “there is a timeless quality about the causes and events.”²

It is this timeless quality of factual events that Mendelsohn re-figures in a pluralistic text with which, on one level, authorship is conceived as a metaphysical abstraction, on another the author is just “an agent of verisimilitude”. Thus, the distinction readerly-writerly is blurred and Mendelsohn’s novel becomes the story of a search as well as research - the journey in search of the fate of the members of the Jewish family who perished (i.e. “to pass through”) in the Holocaust and the hermeneutical attempt at finding in the “total plot” of the Genesis the explanation of things “as they are and as they were”, a hypertext for discrete time sequences. This leads to a criss-crossing of diachronic and synchronic references, a “furrowed” intertextuality in a constellation of continuity, succession, and recessions referring the factual to the absolute text of the Torah. The reader encounters what might be called an archeological version of intertextuality in which the figural and the topological are superimposed upon the extra textual referent of both myth and history. Unitary authorship is challenged by the collaborative model and thus, to use Foucault’s terms, the author becomes a “creative field”, resorting to a materialization of subjectivity. The verbatim account and ubiquity of the interviewed witnesses of the Holocaust acquires a metafictional function. The absolute truth of the Torah but also images of the Odyssey or Aeneid are tested, displaced, or confirmed. Torah is itself but part of a “scholarly detective story”, a story about something “we thought we knew.”

In his considerations on fictions and literary fictions, F. Kermode reminds us that hermetists have used the words “chronos” and “kairos” to account for different types of temporality. The former is just “a damn thing after another.” The latter implies a “boundary situation”, “a moment of crisis of intemporal significance³ that” ... transforms the past, validates Old Testament types and prophecies, and establishes concord with origins as well as an end.”⁴

Mendelsohn’s is a narrative of transgression (Genette would call it metaleptic) proving how historical time and the time of historiography, free of the absolute, is

¹ Mendelsohn, Daniel. *The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million*. London, New York, Toronto, Sydney, and New Delhi: Harper Perennial, 2008.

² Capote, Truman. “The Story Behind the Non-fiction Novel.” An interview by George Plimpton. *New York Times Book Review* 16 Jan. 1966.

³ Kermode, Frank. *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*. London, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1967, 47

⁴ Idem., 48

part of a universal meaning, how non-narrative contingencies are part of the historical continuum. They act as substitutes for tradition, they unify past, present, and future, previously of significance only to chronicity.

The Lost is a narrative of interruption and resumption, a counter-punctual reconsideration of the relationship between figure and fiction. It is a first-person narrative (the traditional “author metalepsis”) that uses an enormous variety of transgressive practices. The authorial voice is accompanied by the reports of many storytellers, witnesses, or participants in the horrors of World War II (the alleged objectivity of journalism and memoirs). These reconstruct a terrible past with a view to accomplishing the narrator’s search. Mendelsohn states, “...so, I’m used to the discrepancies between fact and the “records” and don’t get very upset by them.”⁵ For him, history is not a succession, but parts implied in the whole. The text is to-and-fro movement from fragment to total experience, from a particle to the absolute, an intertextual game that embraces in its temporality, past and present, metafiction and semantic gamesmanship. The truth of Genesis is reduced to the archetypal imagery of separation (light vs. dark, night and day, dry land and oceans, plants and animals) of a struggle between opposites, between activity and stasis that finally reaches the crucial distinction between the Bad and the Good. “*The Germans were bad...the Poles were worse...the Ukrainians were the worst.*”⁶ Knowledge of Bad and Good becomes apprehensible only by eating from the Tree of Knowledge. And it is near an apple tree at the back (not in the centre) of a humble garden in the remote village that the writer’s uncle and his cousin are killed by the Nazis. This is the end of Mendelsohn’s journey in search of the truth, but also the end of a thriller claiming non-fictionality.

Mendelsohn’s procedure is synecdochical. “...so the first chapter of Genesis moves gradually from a picture of the skies and earth down to the first man and woman. The story’s focus will continue to narrow: from the universe to the earth to humankind to specific lands and peoples to a single family.”⁷ And Mendelsohn’s story is the story of his Jewish family who is ultimately focused on finding the truth about the fate of Shmiel Jager (or Jägger - die Umlaut, Mendelsohn says, was lost in time). “...a man, who’s born in Austria, goes to school in Poland, gets married in Germany, has children in the Soviet Union, and dies in Ukraine. Through all this, the joke goes, he never left his village.”⁸ The village is Bolechow, in Galicia, the mythical place where Mendelsohn’s ancestors were born and murdered.

The Genesis is also about “...bareness and fertility, and – as it is always the case with tales of adventurous travels – solitude and crowds, the loneliness of the traveler, on the one hand, and the multitudinous bustle of the places he sees, but cannot

⁵ Mendelsohn D, op.cit. 225

⁶ Idem., 99

⁷ Idem., 18

⁸ Idem., 43

belong to, on the other.”⁹ Mendelsohn’s comments on the springs governing the processes of mythisation are interspersed with the comments of the Genesis of an 11th century French scholar rabbi and the interpretations of a 20th century rabbi. The writer notices, “The way in which tiny nuances of word order, diction, grammar, and syntax can have much larger ramifications for the entire meaning of a text colors...”¹⁰ Dismissing the temporal order, Mendelsohn, the classicist, finds that, “...the Greeks told stories the way my grandfather told stories...in vast circling loops, so that each incident, each character had its own mini-history, a story within a story, a narrative inside a narrative...like a set of Chinese boxes or Russian dolls, so that each event turned out to contain another, which contained another, and so forth.”¹¹

In *The Lost*, spatial and temporal unlimitedness and dark enclosed places are equally instrumental means of salvation and annihilation. We are told that Noah’s Ark was in fact a box, “...enclosed on all sides”¹², the infant Moses was secreted in a sealed wicker container in order to escape, and the Tube was the name of the low, enclosed corridor that connected the entrance to the concentration camp to the gas chamber.

The metaleptical process renders the unchangeable stories of the Genesis as agents of change. The tale of Cain and Abel (the tiller of ground and the breeder of flocks) and the famous question, “Am I my brother’s keeper (or watchman)?”, represent the frame for the feud between two Jewish brothers in Europe before and during World War II (one of them Mendelsohn’s grandfather). It is the story of, “...the tortured dynamics of aggression, guilty shame, and tentative forgiveness between quarreling brothers.”¹³ The Chinese boxes (or Russian dolls) are at work again and brotherhood is amplified to the level of the race, the relations between the Jews, the Russians, and the Ukrainians. Noah’s story is the story of destruction and revival, re-figured by the many Jewish voices recorded on computers. The Flood annihilation and distinction between things, separation and segregation, but also purification, is completed by a copy of Himmler’s order concerning “the Final Solution.” The fate of Sodom and Gomorrah begs questions about the magnitude of the punishment and the moral implications of not sparing innocent people. Was the whole German nation guilty? What about the Ukrainians impaling Jewish babies on their pitchforks or throwing them out of the windows? Time does not impinge upon human suffering and guilt. Genesis is about escape, about fleeing and hiding. Mendelsohn records the story of a wandering Jew, Bruno Kulberg, who in 1942 crossed the Caucasian countries, wandered through Asia and Europe to return to his native village. We are informed that, “maybe there were so many Jewish ghosts that you were bound, in the end, to run into one.”¹⁴

⁹ Idem., 349

¹⁰ Idem., 17

¹¹ Idem., 32

¹² Idem., 243

¹³ Idem., 105

¹⁴ Idem., 422

Mendelsohn's temporal loops go beyond daring hermeneutical attempts and inquiries about "the lost" and thus cyclic and linear time intermingle, history turns into histories to be swallowed by myth. The naked Jews had to build up their human pyramids with the rabbis on top as a means of torture, but the Egyptians had their pyramids and the Incas had theirs. "And the Tops of the Mountains Appeared Once Again" is the title of a chapter dedicated to Noah.

Between the timelessness of myth and the vicissitudes caused by passing through a chain of databases and never complete archives, exemplary heroes and common Jews are subject to semantic jests, shifting lexical processes and unexpected alterations. Names and nicknames, a variety of toponyms interchange or disappear depending on whether we are in Lwow, during the War, or in Vilnius, Sydney, Vienna or Tel-Aviv after the War. With scientific accuracy, proofs are adduced about why and how Abram has become Abraham, Sarai, Sarah, and why Abraham's son was baptised Yitzik (Yiddish for "he laughed"). But we also learn about what anti-Semitism, the fiction of escape, brings about in the Babylon of the Central Europe during the War and among the exiles after the War. Towns, villages, and individuals alike are annihilated or reborn by pure linguistic procedures. Because, Mendelsohn explains: "The word *specific* comes from the Latin word *species* which means "appearance" or "form"...it is because each type of living things has its own appearance or form that, over numberless centuries, the word *species* gave birth to *specific*, which means among other things, "*particular to a given individual*"... [It] will always be *impossible to know*... [whether those in the story]...were *specific*, the subjects of their own lives and deaths and not simple puppets to be manipulated for the purposes of a good story, for the memoirs and magical-realist novels and movies."¹⁵

Besides testimonies, recordings, and documents, *The Lost* contains many paratextual elements¹⁶: pictures, landscapes, panoramic views, photos of monuments, but mostly inscapes. The law against engraven images is neglected because distance and nearness are completed in the novel by memory and expectation. The "taking in" of the pictures is a scale-model of the way in which "immediate memory" recalls past experience within a unique spatial order. There is nevertheless another significance of the pictures. Mendelsohn tells us how in Virgil's Aeneid, the hero, one of the few survivors of the destruction of Troy, whose friends and relatives were killed, travels to Rome to begin life anew. During his journey, he stops at Carthage, a city founded by another exile, Dido. While admiring the magnificent new buildings and monuments of the city, Aeneas and his companion arrive at a mural with pictures of the Trojan War. For the Trojan, this is just a decorative motif, a piece of adornment, but for Aeneas this is his life. He bursts into tears and utters the well-known words: "Sunt lacrimae rerum." *There are tears*

¹⁵ Idem., 502

¹⁶For further details, see Prager, Brad, "The Holocaust without Ink" in Baskind, Samantha and Ranen Omer-Sherman. *The Jewish Graphic Novel: Critical Approaches*. Rutgers University Press, 2010. pp 114-115.

in things will become "...part of the fabric of Western civilization...the name of a musical group and the title of a musical work...the name of Web sites and blogspots ...a science-fiction fantasy novel...the title of a scholarly work."¹⁷ This is emblematic for Mendelsohn's novel. In turn, Russians, Germans, or Ukrainians may be liberators or aggressors. The members of his family who died in the war revived ancient rites, the loops in time can only reveal a shifting border between what is unchangeable and what gives sense to history, ultimately between particle and wave.

Liberated from the straight jacket of self-referentiality, Mendelsohn's novel begs for an answer as concerns fictions of literature. While searching it in the hermeneutics of the Genesis, in a travelogue, or in the indictment of the horrors of the Holocaust, we find it when Mendelsohn claims to have solved the problem of the Chinese boxes: "To be alive is to have a story to tell. To be alive is precisely to be the hero, the centre of a life story. When you can't be nothing more than a minor character in somebody else's tale, it means that you are truly dead."¹⁸

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¹⁷ Idem., 183

¹⁸ Idem., 434

BEN OKRI'S MADAME KOTO AS A METAPHOR OF COLONIAL DOMINATION

ANCA – IOANA MAIER¹

ABSTRACT. *“Ben Okri’s Madame Koto as a Metaphor of Colonial Domination”*. The focus of this paper is on Madame Koto, one of the main characters in Ben Okri’s trilogy, *“The Famished Road”* and is an attempt to outline the main traits of her personality. At the same time it concentrates on showing how the Nigerian writer uses this character as a metaphor for the British colonial domination in Nigeria thus revealing the negative aspects of this period that marked deeply the history of the African state.

Keywords: Ben Okri, *“The Famished Road”*, colonialism, domination, transformation, irony.

REZUMAT. *“Madame Koto a lui Ben Okri ca metafora a dominației coloniale”*. Subiectul acestui articol este caracterizarea personajului Madame Koto din trilogia *“Drumul înfometat”* de Ben Okri. Autoarea urmărește modul în care scriitorul nigerian construiește personajul ca metaforă a dominației coloniale în Nigeria evidențiind, în acest fel, aspectele negative ale perioadei respective ce a marcat profund istoria statelor africane.

Cuvinte cheie: Ben Okri, *“Drumul infometat”*, colonialism, dominație, schimbare, ironie.

“More than three-quarters of the people living in the world today have had their lives shaped by the experience of colonialism.” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1). The Nigerian people were no exception. Their life was dominated by the British for more than fifty years, starting with the end of the 19th century until 1960 when the country gained its independence.

In this essay I will try to demonstrate how Nigerian novelist Ben Okri uses one of his major characters in *“The Famished Road”* trilogy, Madame Koto, to emphasize the negative aspects of colonial domination in Nigeria and its negative effects upon people’s lives.

At the beginning of the first novel, *“The Famished Road”*, which gives the name to the whole trilogy and which brought its author the prestigious Booker

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Prize in 1991, Madame Koto is an ordinary but ambitious bar owner and herbalist who lives in a poor compound somewhere on the outskirts of an African city. Nobody knows who she is or where she comes from. Rumors about her go around the compound. The compound women:

... said of Madame Koto that she had buried three husbands and seven children and that she was a witch who ate her babies when they were still in her womb. They said she was the real reason why the children in the area didn't grow, why they were always ill, why the men never got promotions, and why the women in the area suffered miscarriages. (Okri, "The Famished Road" 118)

Despite her reputation, she does good things, too: she brings wine to the party thrown by Azaro's parents (Azaro is the narrator of the trilogy), prays for the child when he is sick, helps Mum when red smoke comes out of her, feeds her friends and lends money to Mum and Dad without asking it back like the other creditors do. In exchange for her help she wants Azaro to spend some time in her bar because she likes him and believes that he will attract customers.

However, situation changes once politics appear in the neighborhood. It is now that the real Madame Koto emerges from the darkness of anonymity and she begins her astonishing ascendancy towards a privileged position which spans the trilogy and which ironically will lead to her death.

The stages of her transformation from an ordinary woman of the compound into the rich businesswoman who serves the interests of the Party of the Rich and thus her own interests correspond to the three stages of colonialism in Nigeria: Madame Koto's initial coquetry with power, politics and the Party of the Rich stands for the establishment of the British rule in Nigeria in the 1880s; the colonial period itself is represented by Madame Koto's rapid physical and spiritual growth which occurs "at the expense of her community" (Washington 257). Eventually, her death at the end of the trilogy, marks the end of colonialism and the birth of a new era, that of independence for the African state. The first and the last of these stages are relatively short and appear in "The Famished Road" and in "Infinite Riches" respectively. The intermediary stage unfolds through the three novels as it registers the development of what Azaro names "a myth".

"The Famished Road" chronicles the beginning of Madame Koto's adventure into the world of the rich. Initially, her life style and the room where she lives are only a little different from those of her neighbors. Her bar is simply furnished and her clients are the inhabitants of the compound who go there for the palm wine and for the famous pepper soup which she cooks outside, in the backyard of her bar. According to Abiodun Adeniji, "Okri employs the technique of reflecting the social status of his characters through their physical setting." (Adeniji 208) Her outfit is modest, too: she is described as wearing blue wrappers, a red blouse and a filthy head-tie and she does menial jobs: she cleans her bar, serves her clients and prepares the food. But she is ambitious. On the day the

politicians come to the compound, promising various things to the people in exchange for their votes, Madame Koto immediately seizes the opportunity. Azaro notices that she was "... engaged in negotiations with the man at the megaphone, pointing vigorously in the direction of her bar." (Okri, TFR 146) She feels that if she takes the side of the powerful and the rich she can escape poverty. What she disregards completely at that moment is the long term consequences of such an alliance.

Gradually, she begins to show her real self: on one hand, she firmly forbids Dad and the carpenter to talk about politics in her bar, while on the other she welcomes two representatives of the Party of the Rich into the same place. They call her "our friend and supporter" (Okri, TFR 257) and promise to bring her business in return for her being good to them. Now, for the first time, Azaro notices that her behavior towards him has slightly changed: she shouts at him as if he were a servant something that she has never done before. He also sees her hypocrisy when she pretends in order to play her important customers' game: "She came out with a heavy face and re-entered with a big false smile." (Okri, TFR 258) This is the start of her dance with power and she has already changed to please those who can give her a helping hand. It is also the moment when she begins to "throw overboard" those like Azaro whom she apparently does not need any more. After a period of absence from her bar, Azaro returns only to observe another change in her bar and looks. This time she wears more expensive clothes and jewels, make-up and powder on her face.

There is a lot of irony in the trilogy with regard to Madame Koto whom Okri employs to ridicule the colonial power which oppressed Nigeria and its people. In spite of her new looks the child cannot help seeing that sweat ran beneath her powdered face. Although she has reached a new stage in her life, she cannot go beyond what she really is: an illiterate woman who, in order to count her money needs to use her fingers. When she buys her first car she constantly fails to learn how to drive it so people come to bully her calling her "the mad tortoise". She overreacts to different events and loses self-control: she screams, curses, threatens and some time in "Infinite Riches" she seems to suffer an attack of madness following a conflict with the community of the compound. It is clear that the image she strives to create about herself and to advertise in front of the people is miles away from what she is in reality.

She prospers though, because she is a clever businesswoman. Again, as Adeniji observes, the physical setting is an indicator of her status: she brings electricity in the area, but she is the only one who enjoys the facilities brought by the artificial light. Her bar turns into a brothel with proper furniture, electricity and a gramophone. The new setting testifies for her ascendancy from "the struggling palm-wine seller to a rising capitalist and power broker who deals in beer, assorted meats and prostitution. The atmosphere in her palm-wine bar is warm and humane but her brothel is a force-field of harsh, callous and oppressive sensations. The author, therefore, uses the metamorphosis in the setting of Koto's bar and room to

chronicle his message that ill-gotten wealth dehumanizes and causes a debasement of moral values.” (Adeniji 209) Later on, when she gains the characteristics of a Rain Queen or goddess, the bar/ brothel becomes her “shrine”. Her new status brings about a change in her attitude, too: the more powerful she becomes, the more mysterious and distant she grows. People, Azaro among them, dislike her because she is too proud, cruel, greedy and she supports the wrong party. This stage in her development corresponds to the colonial period which despite bringing positive transformations to the traditional Nigerian society: a modern transport system, efficient marine, medical and postal services, a modern economy and a railway also turned the nation against the colonial power because of the subjugation and the all-pervasive authority it brought with it.

Koto’s physical growth goes hand in hand with her ever increasing fortune and spans the trilogy triggering the birth of her cult. As she grows richer and richer, her silhouette keeps changing and so does the way she dresses. From the very beginning the reader knows that she is massive but by the end of “The Famished Road” and throughout “Songs of Enchantment”, she becomes huge. The child describes her in terms such as: “the awesomeness of her body”, “the leviathan figure”, “enormous”, “her body is a bulk which the large chair can barely contain” and “she had acquired a gargantuan space”. Her clothes are another sign of her changing status. From poor and filthy, they turn expensive and extravagant. But, instead of offering her the dignified position of a queen or goddess, they change her into a tasteless carnival mask: she wears gold-bordered wrappers, silk blouses, “volumes” of lace, and so many bangles round her arms that she seems “weighed down by the sheer quantity of decoration she carried on her body” (Okri, TFR 309). She is a genuine kitch: “all about her lights glittered as if she were wearing mirrors” (Okri, “Infinite Riches” 199) so that she “floats” around like “a great ship loaded with exotic gifts” (Okri, IR 199). At times, her face has a cryptic expression.

Although she is almost absent from the compound for long periods of time, she dominates people’s lives and their dreams. However, like the colonial power which knows and hears everything because it permeates all the strata of a society, Madame Koto’s ears are everywhere.

The physical and spiritual growth as well as her considerable wealth secures Madame Koto the position of a powerful center around which the life of the community she lives in gravitates. In order to reach such a position which is feared and envied at the same time by those around her, she uses intelligence and witchcraft. Her good qualities: generosity, her charitable side and compassion are gradually shadowed and eventually obscured by her greed, growing indifference and evil influence on others’ lives. “She uses her powers maliciously” (Oliva 185) to acquire more power and money, to revenge and to manipulate people. She is already a myth, a legend in the community but not a positive one. Dad’s story about the Rain Queen confirms her position as a goddess of the ghetto. Thanks to his special powers, which are those of an abiku child, Azaro can see that Madame Koto has seven breaths inside her: according

to Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, seven characterizes perfection and the divinity (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 291). Like the Rain Queen who has a hut deep in the forest, she has a secret palace where she retreats to recuperate after the scandal with the community of the compound and seems to live parallel lives. Because nobody knows where she comes from, she fabricates a story about her divine origin according to which her mother is a rock and her father is an iroko tree. Around this origin she will build up a false identity trying to justify her presence in the middle of the community and her assumed power over it. But what she builds will collapse in the end because it has no solid foundation: in fact, Madame Koto is nothing but an ordinary uneducated woman who uses her innate powers to evil purposes. She aims too high and the umbrella of power will prove too heavy to bear. In the same manner, the British metropolitan power justified its presence in Nigeria: its initial role was to put an end to the slave trade as “part of the anti-slavery policy of ‘legitimate commerce’” (Flint 220), a concept which had come into being at the beginning of the 19th century as an ideal of the Victorian Age. Later, the campaign to eradicate this kind of trade led to the British intervention in the internal affairs of Nigeria and their assuming jurisdiction over its coastal area. The above mentioned ideal faded and towards the end of the century the aim of the British was merely “to prevent France from obtaining control of the British palm-oil trade on the Niger and in its delta.”(qtd. in Flint 224) Madame Koto’s image as a powerful center is that of the colonial power, a powerful center itself, which dominated and regulated the Nigerians’ lives for more than half a century. Her extraordinary growth, also explained through her name, Koto, which in Yoruba means “Not enough” or “Never satisfied” (Adeniji 143) accounts for the colonial “hunger” for new territories inside the country. In time the Royal Niger Company and the consular protectorate managed to get a big “bite” into the Nigerian territory, demanding administrative claims in the areas along the Niger and Benue Rivers.

In the course of the trilogy, Madame Koto becomes pregnant and so her stomach grows bloated. Her pregnancy is an abnormal one because she carries three abiku children which Azaro is able to see in their mother’s womb. If one accepts that Madame Koto is the colonial power then the evil children she carries and who will never be born can stand either for the negative aspects that colonialism brings with it: oppression, violence and humiliations or for the three provinces: northern, southern and eastern in which the Nigerian territory was divided and which were ruled indirectly by The Empire through local leaders. The latter had been offered an illusory power over the provinces in return for their loyalty to the Crown.

In his essay, “Once upon a Time There Was a King of the Road: Satire and Anger in Okri’s Romantic Myths”, A. Adeniji identifies Madame Koto as an embodiment of the King of the Road, one of the romantic myths he discusses in this essay. The myth is narrated to Azaro by Dad in a period when the family was going through hard times: they were not able to pay their rent and so, to divert the child’s mind from the “impending austerity measures” (Adeniji 142) they had taken to deal with the situation, Dad decides to tell the child a story about the King of the Road:

The King of the Road had a huge stomach and nothing he ate satisfied him. So he was always hungry. Anyone who wanted to travel on the road had to leave him a sacrifice or he would not allow them to pass. Sometimes he would even eat them up. He had the power to be in a hundred places at the same time. He never slept because of his hunger. (Okri, TFR 299)

For Adeniji, the King represents the irresponsible leaders of Nigeria who “In contrast to the Nigerian poor who are condemned to hard labour in the house of hunger...” “... are condemned to blithe pleasure in the house of stolen funds.” (Adeniji 141) It is my opinion that the King of the Road and Madame Koto as an embodiment of it are symbols of The British Empire and of its domination in Africa. Madame Koto’s bloated stomach which is so not only because of her pregnancy but also because of her greed and the King’s insatiable hunger are, as I mentioned above, the hunger of the colonial power to extend its authority into new territories and acquire more wealth. The fact that the King would sometimes eat up those who refuse to bring him sacrifices could stand for the brutal intervention of the colonial power in the internal affairs of the colonized, using armed force whenever diplomacy failed.

Madame Koto’s position as a pivot of the community imposes isolation. Like the Rain Queen from Dad’s story, who lives in a hut, deep in a forest, Madame Koto has a secret palace where she lives sometimes far from inquisitive eyes. When, in “Songs of Enchantment”, Dad and Azaro look for her everywhere, they find her in a shop which seems to camouflage another realm. The child narrates that “We went deeper and deeper, as if into another reality.” (Okri, “Songs of Enchantment” 55) This is her world, her Ivory Tower, the realm of a queen. Here, too, she is associated with number seven: the seven candles that surround her, underlining again her belonging to another world in another dimension thus reminding the reader her “divine” origin. The atmosphere of the room: the ritual smells, the young girls combing and plaiting her hair, the sheep being slaughtered and the yellow mantilla on her shoulders (yellow is the symbol of divine immortality) relate her to the pantheon of gods. Both the Rain Queen and she are unique and out of reach. And so are The British Crown and its domination in the colonies.

Madame Koto’s “divine” descent is also transparent in the objects and animals that surround her. Because of her swollen leg she walks with difficulty, that is why she always carries a walking stick ending in a lion or crocodile head. In their dictionary of symbols, Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant identify the lion with royalty, power and wisdom but in its negative aspect, the lion can stand for the tyrant blinded by his own light, displaying an authoritarian will and an uncontrollable force. In the course of the trilogy, both sides of Madame Koto are made visible. Okri emphasizes her growing negative personality by coupling the symbol of the lion with that of the crocodile. According to the same authors, the crocodile represents duplicity and hypocrisy impersonated by the demon of evil.

The peacock is the bird that accompanies Madame Koto. The image of the peacock shelters two sides: a positive one that symbolizes the solar disk and in this

quality the peacock is a sign of immortality which is an attribute of gods. Its negative side is equated with vanity.

The moonstones that Madame Koto wears round her neck are precious stones. They do not only show to the world that she has become rich and that she can afford to buy expensive jewels. They also symbolize a transformation: from darkness to light and from imperfection to perfection, the latter, another of the characteristics of a god.

All these symbols joined with Dad's story about the Rain Queen in whose figure Azaro identifies Madame Koto confirm that she is undoubtedly the queen of the ghetto or a sort of goddess but a false, distorted one. Her power is illusory as long as she uses it to do wrong. Her final image in "The Famished Road" is that of a vampire-like creature who sheltered by dark sucks the powers of the people in the area and feeds with their dreams:

At night, when we slept, she stole the people's energies. (She was not the only one: they were legion.) The night became her ally. While Dad ranged the spheres crying for justice, Madame Koto sucked in the powers of our area. Her dreams gave the children nightmares. Her colossal form took wings at night and flew over the city, drawing power from our sleeping bodies. ... Our fantasies fed her. (Okri, TFR 568-569)

The metaphor of the colonial center that stretches its tentacles into various parts of the world, Nigeria among them, is evident in several episodes related to Madame Koto.

The first of these episodes occurs in "Songs of Enchantment" during Dad and Azaro's quest for Koto. The dialogue between the man and one of Madame Koto's employees hints at Madame's multiple and parallel existences:

"We have come to see Madame Koto", dad said.

"Which Madame Koto?", the woman asked.

Dad was confused.

"How many Madame Kotos are there?"

"It depends.", the woman said. (Okri, SE 52)

The second episode is related to Madame Koto's funerals. Several funeral ceremonies are held in different places and no one knows where the body is:

We heard that several funerals were taking place for Madame Koto simultaneously in different parts of the country. There were funerals in deep creeks, in remote villages, on hilltops, and in the original home of the great black rock. The biggest funeral took place in her secret palace. No one knew where her body was, and in all the different sites of her diverse funerals, coffins supposed to be containing her body were buried. (Okri, IR 352)

Like Koto who seems to inhabit various parts of her world at the same time, The British Empire extended its domination over several continents from North America to Australia, upset their peoples' lives for decades and marked a

turning point in their history. Nothing was ever the same after colonization. With its end an empire became extinct. Likewise, the death of Madame Koto marks the end of an era in the trilogy: “The time of miracles, sorceries, and the multiple layers of reality had gone. The time when spirits roamed amongst human beings, taking human forms, entering our sleep, eating our food before we did, was over. The time of myth died with Madame Koto.” (Okri, IR 331)

In the passages relating her death, Okri’s irony is again at work. Koto dies at the peak of her career, during the political rally whose promoter she is and which should have been the coronation of all her efforts and the beginning of a new life for her in the shining lights of power and prosperity following the elections that were scheduled to take place immediately after the long awaited event. Ironically, she is stabbed in the course of the rally by her own followers scared at the prospect that she wants to become a god and that she might love people. As she had once predicted, power and wealth finally broke her wings. A huge abyss opens at her death between her ambitions, glory and glamour which she boasted in front of the poor while she was alive and her “gargantuan body lying at the roadside” (Okri, IR 321) and which Azaro trips over by mistake. Highlighting the fact that any form of power is vain and ephemeral, death returns Madame Koto to the reality of her departure: her shameful end is not the one of a queen but that of an ordinary criminal. Her fame, wealth and power were merely the expensive cloak that hid for some time but did not manage to destroy her real self and replace it with a new better one. In the same manner, the colonial power in spite of its accomplishments in Nigeria could not conceal its real face: its dark side meant humiliations, segregation, oppression, manipulation and frustrations.

Irony also lies in the word “Madame” that Okri attaches to Koto. “Madame” which is “a title used to address a French speaking woman, especially a married one” (“Dictionary of Contemporary English” 860) or “Madam” which is “a polite way of addressing a woman” (“Dictionary of Contemporary English” 860) does not go with what comes after it: “Koto” with its meaning implying greed, because a well educated woman is supposed to know what good manners are and the boundaries of socially accepted behavior to which Okri’s Madame Koto is a total stranger. Her meteoric career into the land of wealth and her supposedly divine origin do not transform Koto into a lady over night. In fact, they prove too heavy for her to carry and drag her down into the anonymity from which she initially struggled to come to light.

Following her death, Madame Koto’s myth begins to disintegrate paralleling her disintegrating body. Both literally and figuratively, the edifice she created gradually collapses crushed by its own weight as shaken by an earthquake. Likewise, the edifice of colonialism turned to dust when the wave of independence shook the African continent in the middle of the 20th century.

Sumptuous funerals are held for Madame Koto. She is buried like a monarch: clothes, utensils, pets, jewels, food, musical instruments and the jackal-headed

masquerade are buried with her to serve her in the afterlife. At this point, number seven appears again but carrying a different meaning than earlier in the novel: Madame Koto's coffin has seven padlocks, her grave has seven corners, the gun salutes at her burial are seven and they are answered in seven distant places. According to Chevalier and Gheerbrant seven symbolizes the end of a cycle and the beginning of a new one. Madame Koto's death is the end of a magic realm which she controlled, the end of myths. With her disappearance, a new time begins when "the faces of the women had lightened, ... their eyes shone. ... the men had lost their vaguely stupid expressions. An inexplicable pestilence had been lifted from our collective air." (Okri, IR 392) The "inexplicable pestilence" Azaro talks about is nothing but colonialism that infected the Nigerians' lives. The independence which they had struggled for and finally gained in 1960 marked the start of a new cycle and of new transformations. A new nation was born. For Azaro and the people of the compound, time "quickenened" after Koto's death and "... on another morning, on awakening, we found that the much delayed elections were upon us. The elections would seal the fate of the unborn nation." (Okri, IR 393).

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**“AFTER THE LEAVES HAVE FALLEN”
ZEN AND THE ENLIGHTENING OF THE SELF
IN MODERNIST POETRY**

OCTAVIAN MORE¹

ABSTRACT. *“After the Leaves Have Fallen”. Zen and the Enlightening of the Self in Modernist Poetry.* This paper sets out to examine a number of connections between Modernist poetry and the path towards the enlightening of the self in accordance with the Buddhist/Zen perspective on the role of meditation, spiritual advancement, as well as the search for balance and harmony. Through a metaphorical reading of certain Modernist efforts to incorporate Oriental material, we attempt to shed light on the ways in which poets of the age sought to provide answers to the problem of the individual living in a world marked by dichotomies, fragmentation and the alienation of subject from object.

Keywords: Stevens, Modernism, Buddhism, Zen, enlightenment, still point, painting, seeing, No-Mind, old-age

REZUMAT. *“După ce frunzele au căzut”. Zen și iluminarea sinelui în poezia modernistă.* Lucrarea de față își propune să examineze o serie de conexiuni dintre poezia modernistă și calea spre iluminarea sinelui, în conformitate cu perspectiva budistă/Zen asupra rolului meditației, a perfecționării spiritului și a căutării echilibrului și armoniei. Printr-o lectură metaforică a unor eforturi Moderniste de a incorpora surse orientale, vom încerca să evidențiem modalitățile prin care poeții epocii au căutat să ofere răspunsuri la problema individului care își duce existența într-o lume marcată de dicotomie, fragmentare și sentimentul alienării subiectului de obiect.

Cuvinte cheie: Stevens, modernism, budism, Zen, iluminare, punct fix, pictură, percepție vizuală, Ne-Gândire, bătrânețe

After the leaves have fallen, we return
To a plain sense of things. It is as if
We had come to an end of the imagination,
Inanimate in an inert savoir.
—Wallace Stevens, *The Plain Sense of Things*

If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him.
—*Buddhist dictum*

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1. Old-age wisdom of still natures, or from six persimmons to six significant landscapes

In his late poem entitled “The Plain Sense of Things”, Wallace Stevens, the poet engaged in a lifelong debate with the relationship *mind-imagination-the world*, emerges as an advocate of a change of attitude that should characterise any enlightened spirit: the poet seems to have finished his “combat with the sun,” realising the insufficiency of the imagination's mechanisms for creating a harmonious compound structure of interior-exterior, subject and object. At this point, his poetic creation has come full-circle, passing through the extremes of a “disillusionment at ten o'clock,” “ideas of order” and “auroras of autumn.” As the themes and titles of his old-age poems suggest, Stevens now craves for an appeasement that is seen as originating in repose, sleep, the impenetrability of a rock, a river flowing “nowhere, like a sea,” or “a palm at the end of the mind” populated by a bird that sings without “human meaning, without human feeling/A foreign sound.” On the surface, Stevens's old-age poetry may be seen as pervaded by a sense of renunciation tributary to experiencing the acute sense of alienation of the self, consequent on the upheavals that affected the 20th century in its first decades. Yet, the same poetic vision of twilight is expressive of a more serene stance, in which opposites seem to have merged, bestowing calm upon the troubled mind:

The two worlds are asleep, are sleeping now.
A dumb sense possesses them in a kind of solemnity.
The Self and the earth—your thoughts, your feelings,
Your beliefs and disbeliefs, your whole peculiar plot; (CP 501)

Stevens's old-age poetry successfully reconciles subject and object, the individual and the world. Along the lines proposed by Kathleen Woodward (1980), one can claim that there is a refreshed, revitalised perception of the world and the self in the late poetry of the great Anglo-American Modernists. The poets rediscover or recuperate values and their verse is marked at this point by more “heroic” attitude that no longer comes from combating reality, but rather from the virtues of acceptance and detachment. There is a “dumb sense” that nevertheless possesses “a kind of solemnity,” derived not from renunciation, but rooted, as Stevens admits, in a wisdom that comes from “a new knowledge of reality” (CP 534).

This “new knowledge” is explainable both through the particulars of each poet's literary development and, as Stevens would put it, as a necessity, “required as a necessity requires” (CP 503). The composed vision emergent in poems such as those collected in Stevens's *The Rock*, Eliot's *Four Quartets* or Pound's *Pisan Cantos* bear the imprint of the lifelong preoccupations and struggles of each individual poet, but they are also the result of some inherent forces that circumscribed Modernism and the social, political, cultural and aesthetic context of the age. For, despite the peculiarities of each artist, there is a common spirit in what, in Woodward's line, could be called “the second age of Eliott”: it is an age built along four major co-

ordinates: (i) the central image of the still point, (ii) a method of reflection that denies the Cartesian view of the act of the mind as conscious, Promethean and dominating, stressing instead an easy penetration of mind and world (an “ecology of the mind”), (iii) the image of a new hero, the wise old man, set in a society that would worship youth and (iv) a dedication to tradition and the creative act as a stay against chaos, most often manifested in the life review (4-6). These are, basically, the same co-ordinates that Stevens metaphorically captured in his poem “The Irish Cliffs of Moher”:

Who is my father in this world, in this house,
At the spirit's base?
My father's father, his father's father, his—²
Shadows like winds
Go back to a parent before thought, before speech,
At the head of the past.
They go to the cliffs of Moher rising out of the mist,
Above the real,
Rising out of the present time and place, above
The wet, green grass.
This is not landscape, full of the somnambulations
Of poetry
And the sea. This is my father or, maybe,
It is as he was,
A likeness, one of the race of fathers: earth
And sea and air. (CP 501-502)

The “spirit's base” is a still point against which the human dimension is represented by the domestic space of the house where the mind finds comfort; it transcends time and space and becomes a source of integration. The poetic imagination, as in “The Plain Sense of Things”, being an intermediary between interior and interior, is seen as a hindrance in the path of re-integration in the world, and is thus discarded. The world here is neither imaginatively translated, nor rationally comprehended. There is nothing but “mere being,” which transcends concepts and thoughts and dwells in a timeless spot where the individual and the race fuse into oneness. This spirit is radically different from the one marred by the sense of chaos and dissolution (both internal and external), as depicted by poems that Woodward would connect with “the first age of Eliot”—the landscape of “Gerontion” and “The Waste Land.” It is a spirit that transcends the dichotomic construction of the West and bears closer affiliations with the Oriental philosophy and religious

² Stevens's reference in these lines to such images as “the shadows” or “my father's father,” as well as his call for a return to “a parent before thought, before speech” bears echoes of the famous *koan*: “what face did you have before your mother and father were born?” While it is not possible to verify any direct connection between the two, both seem to address the same issue of the immateriality of the world and the basic Buddhist/Zen tenet of non-attachment.

thought, as manifest in *Buddhism* and *Zen*, engendered through the “enough-ness” of the mind before conceptualization, opinion, or ideation, and leading to manifold possibilities. This serenity of old age poetry is characterised by a suspension of “knowledge” and the adopting of a “don't know mind,” through which, as Eliot suggested in “Burnt Norton”, body and mind can unite in a mystical communion.

Thus, using as a starting point Woodward's remark on the novelty and freshness of the old-age poetry of the major Anglo-American Modernists, this paper proposes to highlight some of the possible connections between these artists and the spirituality of the Orient, in particular some key-concepts of Confucianism, Buddhism and Zen, at the level of commonalities, influences and analogies, as well as the personal ways in which they were transposed in the works of Eliot, Pound and Stevens. This investigation aims neither at exhausting the multiplicity of such connections, nor at in-depth analysis. Given the complexity of the subject, this would be impossible within the limits of a paper. Rather, it will build around the central image of the “enlightening” of the self, both as an expression of the central Modernist preoccupation with the fate of the individual in a world subjected to the pressures of the new and the re-appreciation of values, and as a global metaphor for its inherent drive to “make it new,” to refresh and revitalise, to be flexible and to transcend limits (at least in its initial programmatic impulses). Analogous to the idea suggested by Woodward, that of the rejuvenation through old age, the argumentation sets out to perform a circular movement, in a metaphorical vein, from the image of stillness, through those of fragmentation and self-assertion, to “the final elegance” achieved through awakening of the true self in the Stevensian manner of “plainly to propound.”

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As Woodward develops on one of the characteristics of the late poetry of Anglo-American Modernists, together with this “second age of Eliot,” the “wasteland” that is emblematic for both Modernist mindscapes and landscapes, transforms into a new image, that of the *still point*, potent and integrative, or at least signals the desire for it, and a belief in its possibility (7). The past is absorbed into the spontaneity of a timeless present and the subject is now engaged in a pure participatory act. An emblematic poem in this sense, she argues, is the above-cited “Burnt-Norton”, which expresses a desire for wholeness, a reconciliation of opposites:

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless
Neither from, nor towards; there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,
Neither ascent nor decline. (CPP 119)

Here, the contemplated object represents a state of balance as the source of change, yet without being touched by it. The still point is the origin of meaningful

creation, both individual and cultural, a point of unity and deep space, and the point of eternal return (“both the new world // and the old made explicit”). It stands for a moment of pure present-ness that can counteract the tyranny of the biological and historical time without degenerating into stagnation (“do not call it fixity”). In its turn, this creates a state of grace, in which, released from the demands of the world and inner pressures, the subject can stand outside time and thus be enlightened by a new wisdom.

The inner freedom from the practical desire,
The release from action and suffering, release from the inner
And the outer compulsion, yet surrounded
By a grace of sense, a white light still and moving (ibid.)

Through its ability to release, the still point becomes the ultimate goal of a person’s life, representing enhanced spirituality, increased consciousness, an inner peace that comes from the acceptance of the “partiality” of one’s existence (what Stevens had constantly decried as “the being that yielded so little”). The still point is a means of articulating the self in its relation to the world, a most adequate way to unite subject and object.

This “stillness” is a point where the first connection can be made with the tenets held by Oriental philosophy and religion. Unlike the perspective on the world envisaged in the Western tradition, the universe as seen in Taoism, Buddhism and Zen, is not marked by binary oppositions or dichotomies. The entire body of Oriental thought builds on the idea of complementarity of opposites, rather than their mutual exclusion. Dichotomies arise where there is an intrusion of the conceptual mind. As Richard Shrobe explains in his book on Korean Zen, “Don’t Know Mind,” relating to experience in a dualistic manner (whether through seeing, hearing or sensing in general), dissecting the world into subject and object in a perpetual relationship of “here” and “there,” leads to what in Buddhist philosophy is called “dust.” “Not explaining, not understanding is the transcendence of ideas, concepts, words and speech”—a tenet that lies at the basis of (Korean) Zen tradition³. Buddhism and Zen attempts at sweeping away this dust by renouncing to the “ongoing commentary” on the world, discarding them as being radically different from our factual experience, in fact, nothing more than mere lies (Shrobe 18 – 21).

Stevens strived for reaching out to “not ideas about the thing but the thing itself” (CP 534). As Zen has it, the phenomenal world as a world of dust prevents accession to the original clarity. What is necessary in order to reach through the

³ As R. Shrobe explains, after the death of the Sixth Patriarch, Zen split up into five “schools”, out of which two have survived at present. Korean Zen is distinct from these two, in that it can be traced back directly to the Zen teachings of the Sixth patriarch and his successors. Although sharing a common “bone”, these traditions have different “styles of presentation and different techniques”: *Rinzai-Zen* emphasises illumination through words; *Soto Zen* emphasises “perceptive silence,” while the Korean stream (*Chogyo Zen*) focuses on “perceiving-not-knowing.” (Shrobe 3). The perspective and argumentation in this paper mainly make use of the tenets of this last Zen tradition, building around what Shrobe calls “the don’t know mind.”

curtain of appearances is a letting go of concepts and expectations; by doing so, it is possible “to fall into the world of *just now*, *just as it is*.” (Shrobe 21) This instantaneousness pervades most aspects of Oriental existence, not being limited to philosophy and religion. In this sense, it is possible to speak about a certain “one-ness” underlying the Eastern space as a unifying force—that which Pound so much esteemed in Confucianism. As will be seen in a later section of this paper, Pound even adopted it as an aesthetic principle through his allegiance to the “one-principle text.” In the following, one such example illustrated by Oriental art will be examined in more detail.

Mu Chi’s “Six Persimmons” (c. 1270) is a fine example of Chinese still life painting. To a Western eye, and especially a modern audience, this painting may seem as overly banal: there are six persimmons, only differing in shape, shades and position, set against a blank background. At face value, the depiction of the persimmons has echoes of the above-mentioned creed in the “just now, just as it is.” There appears to be nothing beyond the object: it is impervious to human scrutiny, much like Zen painting in general. To make an analogy with Stevens’s remark on poetry as the “supreme fiction,” one may say that the persimmons “resist the intelligence almost successfully.” Each persimmon functions as a still point on its own, yet their substantive commonality enables the contemplating subject to sense the underlying principle that unifies them into one single entity, simultaneously encompassing past and present, as suggested by the different shades used for their depiction, as well as by their shapes and sizes. Still life thus comes to life in front of our eyes—there is ripening and decay, life and death unfolding on the canvas. Yet, despite the metaphorical connotations, the persimmons, in a truly Zen spirit are ungraspable in their essence. They remain pure objects and a communion with them is possible only after suspending our conceptual thinking and casting doubt on the capacity of our senses to gaze beyond the surface of things. The idea is the same as Stevens’s suggestion in his “Study of Two Pears”:

Opusculum paedagogum.
The pears are not viols,
Nudes or bottles.
They resemble nothing else.

[...]

The pears are not seen
As the observer wills. (CP 196)

In addition to the necessity to suspend conceptual thinking, both pieces seem to connect with another key-concept of Oriental thinking: the intrusion of human will and desire in the space between subject and object. As Buddhist faith holds, “desire” or “craving” are the roots of worldly misery. A life through meditation and compassionate participation is required to weed out such sources of “dust” and open up the path toward illumination, and eventually leading to an enchanted-enlightened state of existence through experiencing the void, where the circle of

cause and effect is broken and nirvana is attained. As Mu Chi's painting suggests (and as implied in Zen art and philosophy in general), one should not look too far for a starting point. The immovable object contains in itself the same void (or “no-mind”) that can be attained after enlightenment.

In the light of this, as Peter Y. Chou (2008) remarks, “Six Persimmons” transcends its immediate function and may be read as an allegory of the stages of enlightenment, as well as of the creative and mental states experienced by the artist while working on his canvas. Chou proposes a parallel reading of two pieces, by juxtaposing Gary Snyder's poem “The Persimmons” and Mu Ch'i's ink painting. For the sake of this discussion, we will summarize only the points on the latter, which will serve as an analogy with another Stevens Poem, “Six Significant Landscapes.” As Chou argues, the depiction of the persimmons follows a four-step process analogous to the moments involved in the road towards enlightenment. At the beginning, there is the darkness of Deep Sleep, the Unconscious (or the No-thoughts state). This is symbolised in the painting by the two black persimmons, emerging from the dark void or emptiness to manifestation (the brush of full ink). The next stage is represented by the Twilight of Dreams, or the Semi-Conscious, suggested by the two grey persimmons that mark a transition from complete darkness to the world of shades (by the artist's use of some ink on the brush). The third moment is that of the Daylight of Wakefulness—the Fully Conscious, embodied on the pictorial plane by the two white persimmons, rendered by using almost no ink on the brush. The final stage is that of the Satori, or Buddha Mind, the Pure consciousness, symbolised by the painting's background—the canvas against which the black, grey and white persimmons rest, untouched by ink or brush, or the emptiness as substratum for form.

Chou's interpretation of the possible symbolism of “Six Persimmons” is similar to what Stevens does in some of his anthological poems, most notably in “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” (CP 92-95). Here, the blackbird, just like the persimmons, is both an individual (a form) and a force (a principle). It is the thing which, by its conspicuous and ubiquitous nature, unites human and human (a man and a woman and a blackbird are “one”), observer and object (the man mistaking the shadow of his equipage for blackbirds), cause and effect (the mood which traces in the shadow “an indecipherable cause”), reality and conceptual thinking (“the beauty of inflections” and “the beauty of innuendos”). As such, it extends the functionality of the jar “placed in Tennessee” in “Anecdote of the Jar” (CP 76) through a more dynamic image. Despite its moving nature, the blackbird eventually remains an image of formlessness the moment it comes to rest in the cedar limbs of the final stanza (somehow in anticipation of the bird that stands motionless in Stevens's last poem, “Of Mere Being”).

Stevens's parallels with Zen art and thinking are taken one step further from the symbolism of “Thirteen Ways...” in another piece constructed against the varying instances of one single unifying element. “Six Significant Landscapes” (CP

73-75), another of his early poems, can be read much like Chou's reading of "Six Persimmons." Apart from the commonality suggested by the occurrence of the number six, this poem may be interpreted both as an extended metaphor of the "no-mind" and a direct critique of conceptual thinking. The first four stanzas are centred around the subject, continuously juxtaposed against the object: an old man in the shadow of a pine tree, the night concealing herself like a bracelet, the "I" that measures itself "against a tall tree," one's dream nearing the moon. The images that prevail in these lines are in themselves similar to those favoured by Oriental poetry—"shadow," "tree," "pool," "moon"; the construction too is analogous to a certain extent (although different in metric pattern) to the haiku, by a succession of sudden leaps from one thing to another, apparently unrelated thing at the end of the first three stanzas (a technique also employed by Pound in his "In a Station of the Metro"). In addition to these elements, the title of the poem comes to place Stevens in the lineage of Chinese nature and still life poetry. Just like the six persimmons that function both individually and as a group, the landscapes both depict different facets of the same reality experienced primarily at a sensorial level and function as the canvas on which "parts of a world" are immortalised. But the poem does not stop here. In the last two stanzas Stevens expresses his critique of rationalist thinking. He does so, firstly by expressing his disbelief in the power of man-made objects in front of nature ("lamp-posts," "chisels of long streets," "the mallets of the domes/And high towers" which cannot "carve/What One star can carve/Shining through the grape-leaves.") and, secondly, by openly attacking "rationalists" who "confine themselves/To right-angled triangles." The idea expressed in these lines is analogous to the Buddhist creed in flexibility and non-attachment. Living within the cycle of continuous thought is a delusion, and holding on to one's illumination once it has been attained is an unsurpassable obstacle in the path towards revealing one's Buddha-nature. True enlightenment implies non-attachment to anything, including one's enlightening experience. As will be seen in the sections to follow, the *bodhi*, or "awakened wisdom," requires a renunciation to Nirvana in order to aid all humans to achieve enlightenment. As the second opening quote implies, "knowledge" of Buddha is impossible—it is a delusion just like any other caused by conceptual thinking. If one meets Buddha on the way, one must kill him.

2. "Still not far-off": East vs. West, as an exercise in "translation"

This initial excursion into the poetry of the object paralleled by references to traditional Oriental still life painting has had a double motivation. On the one hand, there is a similarity between the Modernist treatment of the object materialised as representations of the still point in the mature works of Pound, Eliot and Stevens and the attention given by Zen to the ordinary and immediate; on the other hand, the analogies are not limited to their function in the path to enlightenment and wisdom. Modernist poetry's affinities with Oriental modes of representation are expressive of the internal mechanisms that affected the field of visual arts at the end of the 19th century. As Rupert A. Cox notes, "seeing is a

privileged sense in Zen arts because it is necessary and prior to all bodily learning” (103). Awakening in Buddhism is derived from a manner of “seeing,” which presupposes the establishing of a direct relationship between the body and mental states (ibid.). Early 20th century poetic approaches such as those of Imagism (in turn tributary to Symbolism) reveal similar intentions to set up such intimate connections between the thing and the perceptive mind (or between the object and the emotions of the observer)—as illustrated, for instance by Pound’s definition of “image” or Eliot’s “objective correlative”. In his turn, in “The Relations between Poetry and Painting” Stevens draws attention on a similar issue, when he speaks in favour of an appropriation by the poet of the methods peculiar to fine arts, based on the assumption that the instruments of the latter can equip the former with novel insights into his own “*materia poetica*.” This, as he says, is the result of the same commonality of experience and knowledge of the real:

Modern reality is a reality of decreation, in which our revelations are not revelations of belief, but the precious portents of our own powers. The greatest truth we could hope to discover, in whatever field we discovered it, is that man’s truth is the final resolution of everything. Poets and painters alike today make that assumption and this is what gives them the validity and serious dignity that become them as among those that seek wisdom, seek understanding. (NA, 175)

Such associations, Stevens goes on, are necessary not only as a form of epistemological experiment, but as an ontological prerequisite. One must not claim that “they are the sole sources [of our present conception of reality];” rather, we must see them as mere steps along the sinuous process of getting knowledge of the world, “a stage in the endless study of an existence, which is the heroic subject of all study” (176).

The similarities between the role of seeing in Zen Buddhism/Art and the Modernists’ preoccupation with the increased role of vision point to issues of broader concern in the analysis of the mechanisms through which Modernism appropriated both tenets and techniques pertaining to Oriental spirituality. In this sense, it is possible to identify two major forces—an extrinsic and an intrinsic one—that can facilitate an understanding of this opening towards non-Western traditions. The former is represented by Modernism’s relating to external sources and the endeavours to incorporate them both as an expression of the individual spirit and the Pound-esque “make it new.” As such, it is an aesthetic and intellectual exercise that implies a confrontation of the individual with his own art and an engagement of Modernism in a dialectic relationship with tradition and its contemporaneity. Eliot’s inclusion of Indic material in the construction of the “Waste Land” or the “Four Quartets” results in both an aesthetic and intellectual exercise, but it does not stop there. Pound’s use of the ideogrammatic method in both his imagist poetry and “The Cantos,” as well as his fascination with Confucianism are not only meant to support a unified artistic vision. With the exception of Stevens perhaps, most Modernist poets who tried to incorporate such

influences could not escape a certain tendency towards politicisation or a penchant for aesthetic and cultural debates which would eventually transgress art. As is well known, in Eliot's case, they became a vehicle for his attempts to root out what he considered to be the Hebrew substratum of European culture, while with Pound, ideas like "dharma" or the Dao of Confucius, ultimately emerged as instruments that would support his views on enlightened, but authoritarian leadership. It may be said that the way this Oriental material was read by the artists of the age, while mostly beneficial for supporting the spirit of Modernism, could not entirely capture the essence of the spirituality and can be attributed, to a great extent, to what Pound remarked while translating Li Po's poetry—the impossibility to translate and abide by this spirituality unless one thinks and feels like an Oriental. The dichotomic-dualistic nature of the Western mind remained, both metaphorically and literally, a perpetual obstacle in the face of true renderings.

As will be seen, the divide between the Eastern and Western "paths" and the imperfect "translations" can also be seen at the level of the second major force—the intrinsic one—that is, in the Modernist endeavour to question and re-define its own aesthetic modes of expression. For an illustration, the following part of the paper will be devoted to discussing some of the mutations that affected visual arts, such as the "reification of vision" or transition from "the retinal" to "the pictorial." As Rosalind E. Krauss points out, a defining characteristic of the 20th century mode of approaching objects is that vision is "pared away" into a condition of pure instantaneity, an abstract condition with no before and no after (like the perception of a base-ball hitter hitting the ball) (284). This is the moment when visual arts and poetry shift from Impressionism to true Modernism, as the retinal of the impressionists is gradually replaced by the illusory pictorial of the surrealists, a visual image that addresses the grey-matter (e.g. Duchamp's precision optics, Pound's ideogram). This is analogous to the inseparability of seeing (sensing) and knowing (understanding), as proclaimed in Zen painting.

Examples of this can be found, in diverse forms of manifestation, all throughout the work of Anglo-American Modernist poets. For instance, Eliot's preference for the conceit as an epitome of his "objective correlative" can be attributed to his fascination with sudden optical shifts, changes in focus and the technique of the visual montage. At the level of poetic imagery, this was conducive to multiple associations, contrasts, unexpected juxtapositions and heterogeneous ideas. The matrix for this, however, had already been established by the predominantly static techniques employed by Imagism and its penchant for techniques employed in Oriental art. Pound's ideogram, as Sergei Eisenstein noted (cited in Laity 430 and *passim*) can be compared to the operations of montage. As his poem "In a Station of the Metro" illustrates, there is a potentiality in the still image to shock the observer by springing into sight and creating a network of associations on the subject's mind:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough. (6)

As in the case of Mu Ch’i’s “Persimmons”, the Modernist poet’s object has the potential to transcend its own immediate significance. Yet, unlike in Zen, where the sensorial experience of the object by the perceiver is meant to arrest intelligence, the Modernist object cannot avoid setting up new semiotic networks: rather than being a vehicle for illumination, as the Western eye would see it, the strength of the object lies in its capacity to offer itself up to gaze and intellectual scrutiny. At a technical level, in Modernist arts this often amounts to the use of such devices as super-position and the creation of associations, as a result of which new meanings were meant to arise. This is illustrated, for instance by Eliot’s approach in “Prufrock,” where the protagonist’s “wistful, sea-borne telescopic gaze [...] lures both reader and citydweller outward toward the ‘shock’ of a submerging modernity” (Laity 434). The super-position works at the level of senses, too. Prufrock’s passage underwater from the secluded private spaces of rooms sapping with human shallowness or the etherizing urban landscapes implies a transition from the purely appreciative eye to a sight that is imbued with auditive and tactile perceptions (suggested both through imagery and the use of stylistic devices like assonance and alliteration⁴:

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown black
When the wind blows the water white and black (CPP 7)

Through its synaesthetic valences, super-position may be a vehicle that brings the subject closer to experiencing the object in its immediacy (the “forever renewable present” that Krauss alludes to, or the “just here, just now” of Zen). As Laity points out, Eliot resorts to this technique in the “Four Quartets,” where the abrupt onset of midwinter spring (in “Little Gidding”) through its “assault” on the eye is at once suggestive of the “incandescent terror” of the bomb and modern cinema’s use of light that “optically flays the spectator:”

Midwinter Spring is its own season
Suspended in time between pole and tropic.
When the shortest day is brightest with frost and fire
The brief sun flames the ice, on pond and ditches...
Reflecting in a watery mirror
A glare that is blindness in the early afternoon. (CPP 138)

Yet, this is still far different from both the function of the image in Oriental arts and the true enlightenment championed in Buddhism. At this point, “experiencing” the object does not imply the subject’s communion with it by entirely excluding the presence of the self. Nor is it conducive to a sense of accomplishment and integration, since, despite the intimations of the “just here” and “just now,” with these Modernist

⁴ In Modernist poetry, “sight” is often used as medium through which the subject’s desires and memories are compounded into a more comprehensive sense of experience. As Laity notes, in “Prufrock” Eliot’s eye “becomes the speaker’s vehicle for the desired crossings into tactile, obliterating intimacies” (438).

poetic techniques there is always an intrusion of semiosis and of conceptual thinking. Dualistic patterns still prevail, for, as Laity remarks in reference to the above-quoted poem by Eliot, “the perceiver is prompted to occupy the gaps ‘between’ wildly deflecting and reflecting light momentarily undimmed by moist or crusted opacities” (444). As such, it can be seen as a form of detachment and abstraction, as Stevens’ approach in “Study of Two Pears illustrates:”

The yellow glistens.
 It glistens with various yellows,
 Citrons, oranges and greens
 Flowering over the skin
 ...
 The shadows of the pears
 Are blobs on the green cloth.
 The pears are not seen
 As the observer wills. (CP 196-197)

Here, the meanings arise not from the observer’s peculiar standpoint, but from what the subject perceives to be a latent semiotic potentiality of the object, as well as from the analogies their sudden juxtapositions may create. Again, the problem seems to be rooted in the same Western conception that nothing can ultimately exist beyond some form of rationalisation / conceptualisation. Metaphorically speaking, in order to attain awakening, the subject should strive to inhabit his own “waste land,” of the “no-mind,” since there is always the possibility that his intrusions may lead to “descriptions” of objects. As Cain (2003) points out, in order to grasp the object in its uniqueness and to attain communion and harmony it would be necessary for the subject (and the poet) to detach from his source of contemplation in an almost painterly (or even cinematic) precision, a transformation meant to maximize the effect of the image by making it dynamic and endowing it with vitality. In other words, the object has to reveal itself without intervention, just like the persimmons, that seem to be both devoid of meanings and an expression of the void. Without such an exercise, the object would either be lost in “the blandness of clinical descriptions” or would move too quickly to be appreciated in motion and thus lose power in representation (Cain par. 10).

The form of detachment at work through such techniques is an imperfect one, as it is pervaded with the conscious effort of the poet to engage in abstractisation and distancing, rather than being done by adopting a contemplative-meditative stance. The problem alluded to in Stevens’ “Study of Two Pears” is symptomatic of some of the sources of dissatisfaction that came to plague Modernist poets until old-age wisdom brought with itself a change of perspective. As Costello notes in reference to some of Stevens’ still life poems, often “the ‘perfect thing’ eludes description or fails to satisfy, and the poems become ‘compounded’ with human desire and imperfection” (445). Like Stevens’ “ultimate poem,” the object “defeats intelligence successfully.”

3. Concluding remarks: “Already there” or Modernist poetry and the Zen “attitude”

Union of the weakest develops strength
Not wisdom. Can all men, together, avenge
One of the leaves that have fallen in autumn?

—Stevens, *Like Decorations in a Nigger Cemetery*

A monk asked Zhaozhou, a Chinese Zen master:
"Has a dog Buddha-nature or not?"

Zhaozhou answered: "Wú"⁵

—*The Mu Koan*

The previous sections were intended to point out some aspects related to the way in which Oriental religious concepts and philosophical views were adopted and illustrated by Modernist poets, both in terms of successes and failures. The key forces underlining Oriental thought, belief and action may be connected with Modernism both at a metaphorical level and in aesthetics. Yet, these connections require judicious examination, due to several factors. On the one hand, despite the “unity in disunity” that characterizes Modernism, it is not possible to speak about a certain “school of thought” or organised movement in support of a large-scale adoption of such tenets. Rather, the poets cited above, in their attempts to include elements of Oriental tradition or establish cross-cultural connections remained tributary both to their individual aesthetic visions and the Western tradition against which their works emerged. Thus, their contribution in this matter remains essentially that of opening up the path to unprecedented perspectives, in a truly Modernist fashion. It is hardly possible to speak about a certain “legacy” that they passed on to later generations, as the poets to follow would have to re-establish the connections on a personal level, by a harmonious integration of foreign material filtered through individual and communal experience.

In the light of these, an endeavour to circumscribe the impact of Oriental influences on Modernist Anglo-American poetry by disregarding both the individual and cultural backgrounds against which such connections emerged might lead to insurmountable difficulties due to the fragmentary and collage-like nature of the influences, as well as the particulars of the development of each poet's literary destiny. Nonetheless, such a study, might prove beneficial for an enquiry into some essential forces that characterised European and American Modernism at an internal level. The concluding part of this presentation is dedicated to discussing one such aspect.

In the concluding chapter of his work on Stevens's meditative stance, William W. Bevis takes up on the question raised by Marjorie Perloff in “The

⁵ This koan is commonly known as the “Mu-koan.” In the original text quoted here, the term that appears is the Chinese “Wu”, equivalent of the Japanese word for negation, “Mu.”

Dance of the Intellect”(1985): “Pound/Stevens: whose era?” Bevis sets forth to challenge Perloff’s argument that it is Pound who should be considered the more modern/Modernist of the two, on the basis of his famous dictum “Make it New!”and his practical application through Imagism/Vorticism. Perloff—as Bevis notes— is unjust in giving such a verdict, solely on the basis of Stevens’s connections with the Symbolist movement. Rather than seeking answers at the level of the technical elements present in the two poets’ works, as well as in their relation to tradition and the degree of innovation displayed by their verse at a formal level, such value judgements should take into account the degree in which these poets managed to express the defining spirit of the age. By taking into account such essential denominators as indeterminacy and relativity of point of view, Bevis proceeds to negate and revert Perloff’s conclusion, regarding Stevens as the true exponent of the Modernist vision. It was Pound, rather than Stevens who ultimately “betrayed” his own tenets by adopting an inflexible attitude and holding on to the fixity of one’s concepts and beliefs. Both Pound and Eliot, Bevis goes on, were essentially “reactionaries,”as neither could fully embrace the idea of indetermination and relativity, nor could they accept the relativity that pervades any individual, subjective frame of mind. As such, in the end, both remained Neo-classical. What they did, to use Stevens’s words, was “to impose” rather than “plainly to propound.” It was Stevens, through his adopting of a meditative stance, that fulfilled what the Modernist project, by definition, aimed at: “the pursuit of impersonality in art” (Bevis 311). Add to this his emphasis on the ever-fluid nature of the imagination, as well as his dialectic view on the relationship between subject and object, and Stevens emerges as a true Modernist.

If we build on Bevis’s remark on the Modernist pursuit of impersonality in art, we may establish a further analogy with the spirit of Buddhism and Zen: at the heart of each there is the essential concept of fluidity, flexibility and open-mindedness. “Don’t hold to anything” — this is how Shrobe captures the essence of Zen (141). Re-evaluate, recuperate, but “make it new” is how Modernists would have it. In terms of attitude, Zen and Modernism are alike, as they both advocate an essential suspicion toward anything rigid or conceptual. With the former, this is a creed; with the latter, it came out of necessity, through its engagement with a world that turned out be fragmented overnight, where there was nothing to hold on, as scales shifted, values changed and beliefs were shattered. The Modernist attitude is a Zen metaphor. In its turn, Zen is a revolution of perspective, similar to that championed by Modernism.

By way of conclusion, it is pertinent to make one last parallel between Bevis’s point on “the Pound/Stevens”debate and the subject of Zen/Buddhist elements in the work of the Anglo-American Modernist: “Eliot/Pound/Stevens: who is more Zen?” Addressing this question requires a succinct presentation of the functions of the elements of Oriental spirituality in the poetry of each, as well as a re-appreciation of the solutions provided by the old-age wisdom that pervades their

representative late works. In this sense, it is possible to identify three major streams, each to be associated with one of these poems.

For Eliot, resorting to Oriental spirituality was part of an effort to find a solution to the desolation that pervaded “The Waste-Land” and “Gerontion.” His still point, as noted earlier, emerged as a unifying force that could bring together the fragments of a dissolving world. His penchant for Oriental culture and religion was meant to enhance the collage of the Modern, as well as to offer an alternative where other beliefs proved to be imperfect. In the end, he remained Neo-Classical or, metaphorically speaking, fixed in the rigidity of his own still point. With Eliot, resorting to Oriental elements came out of necessity—it had a *recuperative* function.

Pound looked at the East with a view to finding a means to renew both poetic form and expression, as part of an endeavour to set up his private aesthetics. In doing so, like Eliot, he was confronted with his own poetic mode and with the world at large, by transferring ideologies from different backgrounds. The ideogram, the one-principle text, Confucianism—all had in common the idea of unifying force, yet in a manner different than was the case with Eliot. Pound did not have to piece together shattered fragments. His effort, unlike Eliot’s, was directed outwards, rather than inwards. He saw in the Orient a means to refresh art and to propose a view on culture and politics. Looking eastward was a source of *self-assertion*.

“Has a dog Buddha nature or not? is the question addressed in the famous “Mu-koan.” The answer is “Mu,” a denial of the question itself, meant to draw attention on its inadequacy to capture the essence of the problem. The “Mu”-solution is one that can metaphorically describe the manner in which Oriental spirituality was expressed in the works of both Eliot and Pound. There was no possibility for illumination, no “solution” to the problems they addressed, since the question itself was wrongly posed in the first place. In fact, it was the wrong question which would necessarily whirl one back into the maze of dualism: self and the world, interior and exterior, subject and object. Can Oriental spirituality offer a solution to the problems of the Western world? Could elements of Eastern literature, philosophy, or religion provide a sense of individuality in art? Could they function as alternatives, at least? As long as they are taken out their context and their role is twisted they may provide useful sources, but cannot guarantee solutions, as they have not been meant to function so. There is no Zen-like illumination like this: while they prove to be useful repositories of ideas, they cannot enlighten the self.

Of the three, it was only Stevens who truly captured the essence of the Buddhist spirituality and the Zen way both intensively and extensively. His kinship with the Orient, though never programmatically expressed, was derived from a personal disposition. It manifested itself thematically, in his relentless preoccupation with the functions of the imagination, the role of the mind in comprehending the world and the dialectic of subject and object. Yet, the affinities can be seen on a more profound level too. The path chosen in his old-age poetry is perhaps the best expression of this. Stevens’s still point neither unites, nor asserts. His “bird in the

bronze decor” (SP 398) no longer challenges the mind to engage in analysis or metaphoric transformations; nor does it offer a solution to personal conflicts. Thus, “the plain sense of things” emerges from the assertion that even “the end of the imagination/Had itself to be imagined,”—that all constructs are elusive and that enlightenment can be attained only by continuously doubting, questioning, denying, by constantly approaching, but never attaining the essences. Stevens’s final objects are no longer there for pure intellectual scrutiny—they are sensed and lived as nothing beyond what they are. They are not invested with the subject’s own desires, or interiorised: the movement is from the perceptive self towards reality, as in a willingness to live among the objects. As a result, the space between the two, as reflected in the poem, is freed from subjective and creative constraints and can be populated with the reader’s own intimations.

“Can all men, together, avenge one of the leaves that has fallen in autumn?” Stevens wondered around the middle of his poetic development (CP 158). In his final days, the answer to this koan-like sentence seemed to come naturally: “a quiet, normal life” was not to be found in “anything that he constructed.” As in Zen enlightenment, it emerged from attaining a wisdom that resulted in a compassionate engagement in the world just as it is here, just as it is now:

He became an inhabitant, obedient
 To gallant notions on the part of the cold
 It was here. This was the setting and the time
 Of year. Here in his house and in his room,
 In his chair, the most tranquil thought grew peaked
 And the oldest and the warmest heart was cut
 By gallant notions on the part of night—
 Both late and alone, above the crickets’ chords,
 Babbling, each one, the uniqueness of its sound.
 The was no fury in transcendent forms.
 But his actual candle blazed with artifice. (CP 523)

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VICTORIAN ISSUES IN *OLIVER TWIST*: A JORDANIAN PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT. *Victorian Issues in Oliver Twist: A Jordanian Perspective.* The purpose of this study is to explore an important topic in the Victorian novel from a Jordanian perspective: Dickens's protest against the social conditions of his age and the moral codes which justified those conditions. In *Oliver Twist* Dickens describes children as the helpless victims of the new industrial world. He uses particular people and places as a context for his presentation of the "strange disease" of modern life.

Keywords: Victorian, children, exploitation, injustice, silence, silenced

REZUMAT. *Aspecte victoriene în „Oliver Twist”: o perspectivă iordaniană.* Scopul acestei lucrări este de a explora o temă importantă a romanului Victorian, din perspectivă iordaniană: protestul lui Dickens împotriva condițiilor sociale din vremea sa și a codului moral care justifică aceste condiții. În „Oliver Twist”, Dickens îi descrie copiii ca victime neajutate ale lumii industriale noi. El utilizează anumite personaje și anumite locuri ca și cotext pentru înfățișarea acelei „maladii neobișnuite” a vieții moderne.

Cuvinte cheie: victorian, copii, exploatare, nedreptate, tăcere, redus la tăcere

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) was one of the most popular English novelists of the Victorian era, as well as a vigorous social campaigner. He wrote from his own experience. His enormous warmth of feeling sometimes spilled into sentimental paths, sometimes flowed as pure tragedy. Dickens was particularly successful at evoking the sights, sounds, and smells of London, and the customs of his day. He criticized the injustices of law, social hypocrisy and evils. Even after many of the ills he had pictured were cured, Dickens still gained more and more readers. Some critics complain of some disorderliness in the structure of his sentimentality, but none has attempted to deny his genius at revealing the very pulse of life.

Dickens's novels were, among other things, works of social commentary. He was a fierce critic of the poverty and social stratification of Victorian society. Dickens's second novel, *Oliver Twist* (1839), shocked readers with its images of poverty and crime and was responsible for the clearing of the actual London slums.

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Critics, like George Gissing and G. K. Chesterton, championed Dickens's mastery of prose, his endless invention of unique, clever personalities and his powerful social sensibilities. However, fellow writers such as George Henry Lewes, Henry James, and Virginia Woolf, faulted his work for sentimentality, implausible occurrences, and grotesque characterizations.

In *Oliver Twist*, Dickens provides readers with an idealized portrait of a young boy so inherently and unrealistically 'good', that his values are never subverted by either brutal orphanages or coerced involvement in a gang of young pickpockets. This idealism serves only to highlight Dickens's goal of poignant social commentary. *Oliver Twist* is among the numerous Dickensian novels concerned with social realism and focusing on the mechanisms of social control that direct people's lives.

Oliver Twist is a good illustration of Dickens's belief that the novel should do more than merely entertain. It should be, he believed, directed towards social reform. Although he bitterly attacks the drawbacks of the existing institutions—government, law, education, penal systems—and mercilessly exposes the injustice and wretchedness inflicted by them, he does not suggest the overthrow of the established order. Dickens looked upon almost all institutions with suspicion, including religious movements.

In order to bring about improvements, Dickens thought it was essential to depend upon the goodness that he felt to be inherent in all human nature. He kept a strong belief that people, if they were not stifled, would behave with fairness. As a result, he firmly hated all individuals, institutions, and systems that he thought were standing in the way of natural human goodness. He does not believe this endowment of human goodness is indestructible. In *Oliver Twist*, he acknowledges that the trait of goodness in humanity can be irretrievably lost if it is subjected to ungoverned corrupting influences. Dickens was more concerned with the outer behavior of people than he was with the exploration of psychological depths.

Dickens's experience of temporary orphan hood and the harsh instructions given by a senior boy in the warehouse, where he used to work, find expression in the novel. That instruction was responsible for his complete absorption into the misery of working-class life. That boy's name was Bob Fagin. Dickens's dislike of him appears in the character of Fagin, the villain from the novel.

The intense sentiment behind *Oliver Twist*, shaped partly by Dickens's own childhood experiences and partly by his outburst at the living conditions of the poor that he had could see all along his journalistic career, touched his readers at the time. Greatly admired, *Oliver Twist* was an indirect protest against the Poor Law of 1834, which instructed that all public charity must flow through the warehouses.

The plot of *Oliver Twist* is constructed around the different false identities that other characters impose upon Oliver, often for the sake of promoting their own interests. Dickens's portrait of rural life in the novel is more positive, yet far less realistic than his picture of urban life.

The story portrays the hypocrisy of the mean middle class bureaucrats, who treat the orphan Oliver Twist brutally while lending their voice to the belief in the Christian virtue of providing charity to the less fortunate. Oliver's real identity is the central mystery of the novel. In the novel, Dickens portrays the daily existence of the lowest members of English society. As a Jordanian reader I am extremely impressed by the Dickensian approach to poverty, one of the problems that still haunts the twenty-first century world. Dickens reaches beyond the experiences of the warehouse, extending his picture of poverty to London's squalid streets, dark bars, and robbers' dens. He lends voice to those who were voiceless and he builds a connection between politics and literature, and his social commentary.

Oliver's instability prevents him from getting educated and grasping knowledge of the complex realities of Victorian culture. As Westburg points out, "static dualism is alien to any systematic notions of personal growth."² A young protagonist, like Oliver, must be receptive to the different languages of social life and able to transfer them to others. The protagonist is less receptive to dialogism than the society where he lives and which proclaims its lack of dynamism in a very clear manner. In my opinion, Oliver is such a character.

The characters' names denote individual characteristics. The name 'Twist', though kept by chance, signifies the ups and downs of fortune that Oliver will encounter. Rose Maylie's name hints at her relation with flowers and springtime, youth and beauty. Toby Grackit's name is an amusing reference to his selected profession of breaking into houses. Mr. Bumble's name points towards his bumbling arrogance; Mrs. Mann's name to her lack of motherly feelings and Mr. Grimwig's to his outward grimness that can be removed as easily as a wig.

Dickens raised his voice against the social circumstances of the Victorian period and the moral codes which accepted horrible social conditions. The novel focuses on children, the helpless victims of the new industrial world. Dickens used particular people and locations as a background for his portrayal of the "strange disease of modern life". In his opinion, this disease was the spiritual/ mental kinship which made life more intolerable every new year. Although Dickens hinted at visions that the world could and should change – visions that were not materialistic - he set those visions against a materialistic, revolutionary background. Consequently, in his opinion rough social protests should lead to thoughts of spiritual revolution.

Dickens focuses upon a social problem and then points to a spiritual/mental condition which is affected by the social circumstances in various ways. This is very obvious in his pictures of urban life. The great writer had a vision of the city life. Although he spent his life in London, he considered London a threat to human race because of the poverty and crime that lurk in its poor neighbourhoods. This is how Dickens portrays London in *Oliver Twist*:

² Barry Westburg, *The Confessional Fictions of Charles Dickens* (De Kalb: Northern Illinois Univ. Press, 1977), pp.78.

Near to that part of the Thames on which the church at Rotherhithe abuts, where the buildings on the banks are dirtiest and the vessels on the river blackest with the dust of colliers and the smoke of the close-built low-roofed houses, there exists, at the present day, the filthiest, the strangest, the most extraordinary of the many localities that are hidden in London ... to reach this place, the visitor has to penetrate through a maze of close, narrow, and muddy streets thronged by the roughest and poorest of water-side people, and devoted to the traffic they may be supposed to occasion. The cheapest and least delicate provisions are heaped in the shops; the coarsest and commonest articles of wearing apparel dangle at the salesman's door, and stream from the house-parapet and windows. Jostling with unemployed labourers of the lowest class, ballast-heavers, coal-whippers, brazen women, ragged children, and the very raff and refuse of the river, he makes his way with difficulty along, assailed by offensive sights and smells from the narrow alleys which branch off on the right and left, and deafened by the clash of ponderous wagons ... Arriving at length, in streets remoter and less-frequented than those through which he has passed, he walks beneath tottering house-fronts projecting over the pavement, dismantled walls that seem to totter as he passes, chimneys half crushed half hesitating to fall, windows guarded by rusty iron bars that time and dirt have almost eaten away, and every imaginable sign of desolation and neglect.³

Dickens stresses upon London's choking, threatening characteristics. He sets his description in the present tense, providing the text with very special immediacy and a permanent aspect. The indication is that one can only roam in this maze but he should not stop. The scene then changes and Dickens focuses on the mental circumstances of the inhabitants who live in these neighbourhoods. When Dickens sends Sikes on his journey which will, finally, lead him to the gallows which he tries to ignore, the writer ultimately locates him in the middle of London's streets. Nothing can harm Sikes more than his mental fetters of guilt.

Dickens sets the climax of the novel in the midnight life of London. It is Nancy sacrificing herself which will lead to the destruction of the evil world of Fagin. Dickens insists on prostitution in order to indicate a terrible disease of an entire society.

Dickens also raises his voice against children's treatment by those who are their so-called guardians. He speaks against the false pretence of institutionalized religion. He also provides the ironical answer where neat and tidy children would be found. For instance, Oliver is 'farmed out' to a warehouse founded by a crafty overseer, Mrs. Mann. When Bumble comes to take Oliver, the following scene takes place:

Mrs. Mann, the good lady of the house, was unexpectedly startled by the apparition of Mr. Bumble, the beadle, striving to undo the wicket of the garden-gate. 'Goodness gracious! is that you, Mr. Bumble, sir?' said Mrs. Mann, thrusting her head out of the window in well-affected ecstasies of joy.' '(Susan, take Oliver and them, two brats up stairs, and wash 'em directly.)³

³ Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (Lebanon: York Press, 2004), p.320.

Clearly the façade of good care is maintained for Bumble. The “inspection” of the parish is also talked about at length.

Besides, the board made periodical pilgrimages to the farm, and always sent the beadle the day before, to say they were going. This children were neat and clean to behold, when *They* went; and what more would the people have!⁴

Children are also employed for gaining publicity for the church and raising funds. Dickens severely criticizes these hypocritical “spiritual institutions”. His protest has materialistic grounds but then he evolves by pointing to the necessity of a spiritual revolution.

In the most popular scene of *Oliver Twist* the protagonist does and says something he gets up and demands for more. The hyperbolic horror and the outrage with which this act is encountered seem to highlight not only Dickens's satirical irony, but the unexpectedness of the situation when any boy from the class can and does speak up. When we have gone through most of the novel, we feel there is reason for further surprise and Oliver is the mouthpiece of this excitement.

Anywhere else in the book, Oliver appears as the mute witness of events with a sympathetic expression on his appealing countenance. Oliver's expressions speak more than his actions. It is very much like the dumb picture of his mother which talks forcefully to him. It is a fact that Oliver flees away from Sowerberry's to try his fortune in London after turning on Noah Claypole. However, this a reaction to his situation more than a bold decision. His initial appointment as an undertaker's Mute is again due to the suggestive pathos of his tender body and pale countenance. Oliver is neither Dick Whittington, nor Samuel Smiles in spite of the sub-heading: “A Parish Boy's Progress”. Definitely, the hint is at the legend behind Oliver's tale and this only increases the contrast.

Oliver is a victim of industrial and urban society. In terms of social realism, Oliver is presented as a passive hero. He also has to maintain his innocence in this corrupting world. He always has a bond with the unworldly image of his mother's spirit and the Maylies' pastoral retreat, even though the world continuously tries to imprison him. He represents a noble but static Christian virtue. This suggests that it is the more dominant vehicles of evil who seem to be colorful centers of dramatic captivation, Fagin being the most popular and unforgotten character. At the beginning of the narration Oliver has no identity because of his mother's mysterious identity. The novel is his tale, but he cannot narrate it for himself. Different persons make up identities for him and provide him with a composite character. Oliver is given his name by others. When he begins to speak for himself at the end of the story, he is forced back into the background. Oliver is displaced by the usurping voice of the narrator.

Oliver's silence can be viewed as the symbolism of the unspoken truth. His non-identity stresses upon the hustle and bustle of people surrounding him. The

⁴ Ibid., p.5.

author lends his voice to express some very serious social concerns. He leaves an impression of easiness about the unutterable peculiarities of moral and social contradictions. *Oliver Twist* dramatizes, but does not express clearly - at least not in this novel - the factor that charity minus general social reform just drives towards inequality.

Oliver's eloquent dumbness is a necessity and completely goes along with the writerly and the social design. The story suggests that we can only have unworldly purity and even this one not permanently and not completely but in accordance with hellish impurity. When encountering opposition, common humans become speechless and roam around without purpose and in moral bafflement although they are optimist that the Providence will send its agents in order to protect them. However, humans are not able to name these agents or claim they know their real identity when they recognize them.

Oliver can be redeemed exclusively through the deeds of Brownlow as a generous father-figure; but Brownlow has constricted the fortune that permits him his benevolence within the very system that has exploited Oliver. Dickens constantly turns to the root of Britain's prosperity in colonial expeditions. As a Jordanian reader, this Dickensian interest in colonial issue is another proof that the writer is also a moral conscience.

In the novel, it is the crafty Dodger who is sailed off to Botany Bay. Oliver's silence is a symbol of the author's own encounter with the unspeakable at the core of British gentility.

The novelist projects the tensions of his work onto the emotionalized figure of the 'fallen woman'. Oliver's mother reflects the destiny of Nancy who both validates and questions the soothing tale of Rose Maylie's adoption and Oliver's acceptance into society. Motherhood and womanhood, as the starting points of inherent virtue, are the exclusive actual points of contact between the gutter and the cottage; an ambivalent symbol of redemption and degradation, assertion and dependency. There is an element of pathos in the works of Dickens and *Oliver Twist* makes no exception. The writer takes up the challenge on behalf of the helpless sacrificial victim, and in doing so he hardly permits him or her to speak. We can feel sympathy, regard, even praise for the victim as far as he/she is kept away, "preserved" in well-guarded traditional books that lend him/her their voice but rarely permit them to speak without in-between.

Dickens provides a kind of solace by displaying a reductive enclosure of gentility and noble feelings. This complex emotional mixture is always exposed to interference by rival forces. The writer insists on the boundaries between the city and the rural side, the class and the crowd, God and human, values and survival, in any form except when demonized during scary visitations. These Gothic moments are to deny the possibility of order and goodness and they warn about the possibility of well-guarded social improvement.

According to Victorian norms, the home must be the exclusive place where children can be rendered immune to the temptations of modern life, and the bread

earner can feel comforted and revitalized from his everyday struggle to get the necessities of life. That is why Oliver is represented as incorruptible and enters the novel with a completely formed personality rather than realistically impressionable. This cultural approach is, anyway, fraught with anxiety. Surely, Dickens is not embarrassed at all when it comes to his bestowing upon his protagonist that "inert nobility" that Mikhail Bakhtin finds characteristic of the archaic "Novel of Ordeal". In such literary works the hero's identity is not changed but merely affirmed by dire experience."⁵

As far as Oliver's state of incorruptibility is concerned, Dickens makes use of ambiguous passages such as the following in which the narrator tells the reader that "nature or inheritance [has] implanted a good sturdy spirit in Oliver's breast."⁶ In another relevant passage Rose maintains that "that Power which has thought fit to try him beyond his years, has planted in his breast affections and feelings which would do honour to many who have numbered his days six times over."⁷

Physically, Oliver has a likeness to his progenitors and the suggestion of his resemblance to Brownlaw's pictures and memories is that his middle-class traits spring from the same source. Even Rose and the narrator's efforts to give adequate equivalents cannot escape from the genteel tendency to cultivate figures of speech. The fantasy which is inherent everywhere is that Oliver's 'blood' is behind his immune personality. This is not in accordance with the novel's structure and politically it is at odds with itself.

There is no explanation in the novel that can seriously compete with heredity when explaining Oliver's protection from ethical contamination. Dickens seems to say that virtues can be hereditary, they are not at all influenced by upbringing. Dickens perceives noble features in Oliver's nature. The moral of Oliver's life is that 'breeding will tell', a moral anathema to various middle-class habits of mind. However, if we think of the whole Dickensian work, the author seems to disagree with himself on this issue. Other characters show that Dickens is completely committed to the notion that surroundings form personality. Here is, for instance, Nancy talking to Rose, "Thank Heaven ... that you had friends to care for and keep you in your childhood, and that you were never in the midst of cold and hunger, and riot and drunkenness, and – and something worse than all — as I have been from my cradle."⁸

This emphasis upon the formative environment also appears in the portrayal of Noah and even Sikes. Generally speaking, and outside the area of the novel's political fantasy, the author is typically Victorian in his assumption of the formative power of surroundings and circumstance.

⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981), pp.105-107.

⁶ Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, p.4.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.262.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.255.

Here it should be remembered that ideology is always individual and psychology is forever social. The childhood trauma clearly influenced Dickens' imagination. The writer cultivated both fantasies and fears about "blood" proving stronger than circumstance. He never completely recovered from his experience of social dispossession.

To some extent, *Oliver Twist* is a biographical novel. There is a reiteration of Dickens' own juvenile hopes in some manifestations of Oliver's middle-class parentage. These would serve to set Oliver apart from the low company and would bring him back to a world of Brownlow and the Maylies.

The boy stirred, and smiled in his sleep, as though these marks of pity and compassion had awakened some pleasant dream of a love and affection he had never known; as a strain of gentle music, or the rippling of water in a silent place, or the odour of a flower, or even the mention of a familiar word, will sometimes call up sudden dim remembrances of scenes that never were, in this life; which vanish like a breath; which some brief memory of a happier existence, long gone by, would seem to have awakened, for no voluntary exertion of the mind can ever recall them.⁹

Oliver has never heard of his mother, but he acts to defend her honor, which appears to change him into a completely different person.

A minute ago, the boy had looked the quiet, mild, dejected creature that harsh treatment had made him. But his spirit was roused at last; the cruel insult to his dead mother had set his blood on fire. His breast heaved; his attitude was erect; his eye bright and vivid; his whole person changed, as he stood glaring over the cowardly tormentor who now lay crouching at his feet; and defied him with an energy he had never known before.¹⁰

If we want to analyze why the author, consciously or unconsciously, might follow such a line of action, we can go back to Harvey who indicates that "our sense of conditional freedom depends upon a combination of factors which, considered singly, may seem to determine us, but which in association tend to liberate us".¹¹

Among the English Romantics, the middle-class mind discovered Wordsworth to be the most congenial to its outlook and the most applicable to its aims.

Oliver Twist is meant to appeal more to our emotions than to our literary sensibilities. The protagonist does not present a complex picture of a person divided between good and evil, instead he is an incarnation of goodness. A major concern of *Oliver Twist* is the question whether a bad environment can forever poison a person's character and soul. In much of the novel, morality and nobility are contradictory issues. However, Nancy's character suggests that the line between virtue and vice is not always clearly drawn.

⁹ Ibid., pp.183-184.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.36.

¹¹ W. J. Harvey, *Character and the Novel* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1965), p. 137.

The meeting on London Bridge is symbolic for the collision of two worlds unlikely ever to meet the idyllic world of Brownlow and Rose, or the degrading situation in which Nancy survives. Nancy is given the opportunity to adopt a better way of life but she discards that opportunity and by the time Nancy, Brownlow and Rose have left the bridge that possibility has disappeared for ever.

In the novel's concluding pages Oliver's half-brother is all of a sudden exposed as the very embodiment of all the earlier generation's upper-class vices. Monks is almost exclusively his mother's child. There is a kind of debate for and against nature and nurture concerning the immunity from evil. It is difficult to say for sure whether the conduct of a person is influenced more significantly by nature or by nurture. Brownlow conducts this debate. He recalls his father talking of "the rebellious disposition, vice, malice and premature bad passions of ... his only son", while at the same time asserting that the boy had been "trained [by his mother] to hate him".¹²

The same vagueness appears when Monks takes up his own story.

"There she died," said Monks, "after a lingering illness; and, on her death-bed, she bequeathed these secrets to me, together with her unquenchable and deadly hatred of all whom they involved — though she need not have left me that, for I had inherited it long before."¹³

This conflict between the innate and the acquired is clearly seen even in such a matter as the villain's venereal disease. Notice the choice of words:

You, who from your cradle were gall and bitterness to your own father's heart, and in whom all evil passions, vice, and profligacy, festered, till they found a vent in a hideous disease which has made your face an index even to your mind.¹⁴

We can just indicate that an anxiety over the sustenance of middle-class values in a morally degenerating world appears to have shaped *Oliver Twist* into one of Dickens' most monologic texts. There is a relation between Oliver's immunity from his surrounding and the truth that the middle class and the criminal areas never seem to affect or interpenetrate each other. The contradictions and anxieties of the bourgeois orthodoxies surround the text of *Oliver Twist*.

Oliver Twist is a novel teeming with many closely interrelated ideas. There is preoccupation with the miseries of poverty and the spread of its degrading effects through society. With poverty comes hunger, another theme that appears throughout the book, along with Dickens's notion that a misguided approach to the issues of poverty and homelessness brings many evils in its wake.

One of the worst consequences of poverty and being deprived of life's essentials is crime, with all of its corrosive effects on human nature. Dickens

¹² Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* p.332.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.333.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.318.

gives a great deal of attention to the painful alienation from society suffered by the criminal who may come to feel completely isolated as the fragile foundations of his own hostile world snap. Crime is bad enough in itself, Dickens seems to be saying. When crime is the result of poverty, it completely dehumanizes society.

On the positive side, Dickens places heavy value on the elevating influence of a wholesome environment. He emphasizes the power of benevolence to overcome depravity. And goodness—like criminal intent—may expect to earn its own suitable reward. Does this sound familiar? The Dickensian theme of virtue being its own reward is rooted in the novels and poems of chivalry and redemption, where the good prosper and the “wicked” are sent packing. This makes Dickensian novels, in general, and *Oliver Twist*, in particular, a reading with general human appeal for any reader regardless his/her ethnicity, religion or personal philosophy.

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BETWEEN PROLOGUE AND MINIATURE – THE “MEANING OF HISTORY”: NOTES ON THE HYPOSTASES OF A WOMAN IN LOVE IN THREE ROMANIAN MANUSCRIPTS FROM THE END OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY¹

Laura Lazăr Zăvăleanu²

ABSTRACT. *Between Prologue and Miniature – the “Meaning of History”: Notes on the Hypostases of a Woman in Love in Three Romanian Manuscripts from the End of the Eighteenth Century.* This study analyses two of the most representative popular books of the period, *The History of Erotocrit and Aretusa* and *The History of Filerot and Anthusa*, focusing not only on the textual body of these narratives but also on the “theoretical” contribution of their Prologues and on the imagery of the miniatures from these valuable manuscripts. These popular romances explore the hypostases of a powerful, self-assertive femininity, confident in its spiritual force and attributes, which seeks to impose itself also as a social force to be reckoned with in a society where marriage represents a contract, and the idea of a couple still precludes the protagonists’ rights to individual freedom.

Keywords: Woman in love in eighteenth century; love as pharmakon; forbidden love; emancipation of woman, loci communes of the courtly romances in the Romanian Popular Books.

REZUMAT. *Între predoslovie și miniatură – „noima istoriei”:* note despre ipostazele femeii îndrăgostite în trei manuscrise românești de la sfârșitul secolului al XVIII-lea. Prezentul studiu analizează, exploatând nu numai corpul textului, ci și aportul „teoretic” al *Predosloviei* alături de cel de imagine al miniaturilor manuscriselor celor mai valoroase, cum două dintre cele mai reprezentative cărți populare ale perioadei – *Istoriia lui Erotocrit cu Aretusa* și *Istoria lui Filerot cu a Anthusei* – afirmă ipostazele unei feminități puternice, decise, sigure pe atributele și forța ei spirituală, căutând să se impună (opunându-se normei absurde și anchilozante) și ca forță socială ce trebuie să înceapă să fie luată în considerare într-o societate unde căsătoria este un contract, iar ideea de cuplu exclude încă dreptul la libertate individuală al protagoniștilor.

Cuvinte cheie: femeia îndrăgostită în secolul al XVIII-lea; dragostea ca pharmakon; iubirea interzisă, loci communes ale iubirii curtenești în Cărțile populare românești

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Although women appeared to enjoy, *de jure*, rather powerful positions in the Romanian society from the end of the eighteenth century, since they were granted, by law, almost the same rights of representation as those of men, they were still, *de facto*, under the tutelage of men – fathers, husbands or brothers – who had decision rights over their lives.³ Still subject to all the social conventions that were bound to cancel their freedom, the women of this period underwent, nonetheless, an irreversible emancipation process, as did, for that matter, the entire society of that time. Given the changes affecting mentality and its ontological benchmarks,⁴ the end of the eighteenth century in Romania also brought about an alternative solution, compensatory and revolutionary at the same time, meant to salvage the individual from the banal course of what was perceived as the vanity of life, redirecting its meaning towards embracing *love*. This was not love in the Christian sense of *agape*, but *eros*, the love that Metropolitan Antim Ivireanul referred to as “passionate and loathsome” in his *Cuvânt de învățătură la Dumineca Vameșului*,⁵ where he refused to discuss it in detail lest it should defile the ears of his pious audience. On the very threshold of modernity, a new type of sensibility added *sentiment* to the already extant medieval values of faith, wisdom and valour. Retrieving the influences of the courtly romance (*roman curtois*), popular books that were a great success with the readers of that time, such as *Istoriia lui Erotocrit cu Aretusa*⁶ and *Istoria lui Filerot cu a Anthusei*,⁷ reconsider the meanings of life in accordance with the protagonists’ feelings, as they are willing to reposition themselves in relation to society and to themselves.⁸

Love turns thus into *pharmakon*, “curing two diseases at once,”⁹ not only love sickness, as Alecu Văcărescu’s lyrics emphasise, but also the “disease of the century,” the *fin de siècle* bringing about the dissolution of older values and the transition towards other models. Under such circumstances, the image of women

³ For a description of the family or couple relations and of women’s positions in these relations, see Constanța Ghițulescu, *În șalvari și cu ișlic. Biserică, sexualitate, căsătorie și divorț în Țara Românească a secolului al VIII-lea*, Bucharest: Humanitas, 2004.

⁴ For a detailed analysis of the phenomenon, see Ștefan Lemny, *Sensibilitate și istorie în secolul XVIII românesc*, Bucharest: Meridiane Publishing House, 1990 and Daniel Barbu, *Scrisoare pe nisip. Timpul și privirea în civilizația românească a secolului al XVIII-lea*, Bucharest: Antet Publishing House, 1996.

⁵ In English, *A Sermon for the Sunday of the Publican*.

⁶ In English, *The History of Erotocrit and Aretusa*, this is a translation of the Greek story *Erotokritos*, written in verse by Vincenzo Kornaros in Crete during the latter half of the sixteenth century, after the model of *Paris et Vienne*, a French medieval romance compiled by Pierre de la Cypède in 1432.

⁷ In English, the title would be *The History of Filerot and Anthusa*. I am considering here the variant extant in B.A.R. Manuscript 1374, from Bucharest, which Angela Tarantino rightly considers to be a rewriting of the *Erotocrit*, and which contains over two thousand original lines by Alecu Văcărescu (*La storia di Filerot e Anthusa. Istoria lui Filerot și cu a Anthusei*, MS. 1374 Bar – Bucharest, Éditione critica, introduzione et traduzione a cura di Angela Tarantino, Rome, Bagato Libri, 1996).

⁸ For suggestions on the *time of love* in the troubadours’ poetry, see Miha Pintarič, *Le sentiment du temps dans la littérature française (XIIe s – fin du XVIe s)*, Paris: Éditions Champion, 2002, pp. 71-83 and for a general outline, see the well-known D. Rougemont, *L’amour et l’Occident*, Paris: Librairie Plon, 1972.

⁹ *La storia di Filerot e Anthusa...*, ed. cit., p. 207.

and, in particular, of women in love, becomes a fundamental means of understanding the social relations of that period.

The *Prologue to The History of Filerot and Anthusa* captures this new outlook on women’s social positions and roles. It capitalises upon the brevity and eloquence that are characteristic of accompanying discourses, which synthesise their message to the point of an essentially apophthegmatic terseness, and it also exploits the rhetorical artifices of introductions, which seek to captivate the readers’ attention and, reeling them in the narrative yarn, to persuade and teach or mould them. The prologue to the love story between Filerot and Anthusa seems to propose, initially, the same reading code that incriminates woman as the source of all evil in, say, the *Book of Genesis*. It sums up the history of the world, starting with the Trojan War unleashed by Helen¹⁰ and continuing with Jason’s love for Medea; the metatextual insertion begins by postulating, at the outset of the narrative, the conclusion that women represent the unfortunate causes of all the great conflicts in the world.¹¹ The gallery of outstanding feminine characters in the history of the world and of the famous couples amongst whom will figure Filerot and Anthusa continues with: Ariadne and Theseus, Atalanta and Meleager, Deidamia and Achilles, Polyxena and Achilles, etc. “Enamoured [...] Semiramis” also appears moralised here. Although these examples – “this sort of repugnant lust” – explicitly focus on the unhappiness and extreme suffering (oftentimes death) caused by love for a woman and on the force of negative models that ought to be wisely avoided by the readers of this insistently moralising text,¹² the prologue – an introductory discourse aimed at *captatio benevolentiae* – does nothing but impart an implicit incentive upon readers to empathise, to the point of directly identifying with the characters, with the message and the tension of the love story. This is especially relevant since the lovers’ “crown” will be bestowed upon Filerot and the end of the prologue suggests to the readers, between the lines, that this is an example worth following.¹³

From the vast framework of the introduction, the history narrows down its scope. Both the *Erotocrit* and *The History of Filerot...* feature, in the manner of

¹⁰ “Elena [...] a lumii frumoasă/.../ Din cea asupra ei fire drăgăstoasă// Încât pentru dânsa o lume să bate/.../ Pentru o fâmee morți nenumărate” (“Helen [...], the world’s beauty/.../ With her overly-loving nature// She, who the whole world is fighting for /.../ Countless deaths for a mere woman”).

¹¹ “Câte războaie în lume pornite;/ Mai tot pentru mueri s-au văzut scornite;/ Câte țări și cetăți au ars risipite;/ Pentru Afrudita cetitor iubite;/ Istoria lumii toată o adună;/ Gândesc că nu-mi vei afla minciună” (“How many wars started in the world;/ Mostly for women have been waged;/ How many lands and citadels burnt down and pillaged;/ For Aphrodite, my beloved reader;/ Were thou to gather the world’s history;/ Methinks thou wouldn’t find me lying about it”), *Ibidem*, p.206.

¹² “Dar te rog să nu faci oareșice urmare;/ Și văzând dragostea ce patimi aduce;/ Să te păzești așa, să nu te apuce;/ Și până nu o începi de vreme-ți fă cruce;/ Cu așa supărări să nu te usuce” (“But please do not follow upon these;/ And seeing the torment that love brings;/ Guard thyself, so it cannot reach thee;/ And before it gets thee, pray;/ That it won’t exhaust thee with such heartache”).

¹³ “Citirea aceștii istorii în care;/ În care să coprinde numai dragostea cea mare;/ Eu gândesc că foarte dulce ți să pare” (“Reading this tale which;/ Which solely noble love encompasses;/ I reckon thou wilt find it fairly sweet”).

fairy tales, the motif of childless emperors. The miraculous birth brings forth daughters rather than sons. In the *Erotocrit*, “a most beautiful girl, so beautiful that her face, because of this great beauty, shone like the sun. And they named her Aritusa and they had her pursue the knowledge of Greek books, and so abundant was her learning that her wisdom exceeded that of any other emperor’s daughter or philosopher.”¹⁴ In *The History of Filerot...*, “such a beautiful damsel that I dare say no other like her was ever born [...] her father, guiding her learning, brought forth wise advisers, and as she was witty and sharp-minded, she had learned the entirety of things before she was ten, so much so that her tutors marvelled at her erudition.”¹⁵ More so than on the uniqueness of their beauty, emphasis is laid on their *wisdom*, *spiritual prowess*, and *erudition*. The portrait of the emperors’ daughters is outlined in perfect similitude with fairy tales in which the narrative concerns male heirs. In fact, this blurring of differences between stark masculinity, so far characterised by spiritual attributes, and femininity, largely identified through physical attributes, betrays, at this point, the emergence of a new human ideal. *Erotocrit*’s portrait becomes peremptory in this context: “brave as a lion and fantastic as a painted golden eagle, his word enthralled the hearts of many and his lute’s strings are chirruping birds, and if his song be heard, the sick would be healed; he has even grown into a painter without having had to learn the craft [...]; and now he has even learned the healing craft, and he cures the wounded and he mends the withered hearts.”¹⁶

Apollo’s ancient powers (three of the four powers are present here: as archer, as master of the lyre and as *medicus*)¹⁷ – a model also exploited by Miron Costin in the discursive test of the labyrinth to which he challenged prince Antonie Ruset in 1676¹⁸ – are still important benchmarks for any ideal type of humanity. The emphasis, however, is now laid on the character’s Orphic qualities, on the *artistic* force of the words and images created and “painted,” and especially on *fantasy*, a completely novel and revolutionary element for the period in question.

¹⁴ In the original, “o fată foarte frumoasă, cât fața ei, de frumoasă ce avè, strălucè ca soarele. Și i-au pus numile ei Aritusa, la cari au pus-o și la învățătura cărții elinești și învățând atât de bine, cât au întrecut pe fieștecari fată de împărat sau di filosof la învățătura ce avè.” In *Cărțile populare în literatura românească*, edited with an introductory study by Ion C. Chițimia and Dan Simonescu, Vol. II, [Bucharest], E.P.L., 1963, p. 33.

¹⁵ In the original, “o cocoană atât de frumoasă încât îndrăznesc a zice că în toată lumea nu s-au născut asemenea. [...] supuind-o întru învățătura cărții, îi orânduî tatăl său tot felii de dascăli și fiind plină de mare duh și supțire la minte, până în vârsta de 10 ani nu-i mai trebuia altă învățătură, că le-au învățat pe toate covârșit, încât și dascălii se minuna de precopseala ei.” In *La storia di Filerot e Anthusa...*, ed. cit., pp. 2212-213.

¹⁶ In the original, “leu la voinicie lui și zgripsor aurit și zugrăvit la fandasie lui, și cuvântul lui robești inemile omenești și struneli alăutii lui pui sunt și cântă, iar versul lui, de l-ar auzi cineva, vreun bolnav s-ar însănătoșa; până și zugrav s-au făcut fără de dascălie meșterșugului [...]; și acum au învățat și meșterșugul doftoriilor, și pre cel rănit îl doftorești, și inimile cele ce sunt vestejite de-a pururi vra să li răureză.” *Ibidem*, p. 44.

¹⁷ Cf. Georges Dumézil, *Cele patru puteri ale lui Apolo și alte eseuri. Douăzeci și cinci de schițe de mitologie*, Translated by George Anania, Bucharest: Univers Enciclopedic, 1999.

¹⁸ Miron Costin, *Opere II*, edited by P. P. Panaitescu; Bucharest, Editura pentru literatură, 1963, pp. 127-128.

Neither piety nor insight is a keystone in shaping the individual any longer. They are perpetuated *via* an ethical memory, but there has been a shift of emphasis. An exemplary protagonist is still characterised by “wisdom, understanding and astuteness,” but the imaginative, creative capacity acquires greater significance: the character from *The History of Filerot...* “was so wise that her mind birthed things which more learned people could not fabricate... [s. m.]”¹⁹ “Beauty, wisdom,/ Speech, spirit and wit” were the attributes of the ideal woman in Alecu Văcărescu’s lyrics.²⁰

Throughout the two romances analysed so far, the female protagonists embark on a journey of initiation and are subjected to the test of love, proving that they are endowed not only with wisdom,²¹ but also with a depth of feeling and with ingenuity in finding solutions to the fulfilment of their love.

Against this background, love becomes a new manner of self-discovery, of adjustment to the world and relating to the other, who is no longer a menacing stranger, an intruder or a mere messenger; through a process of interiorisation and assimilation, the other becomes another facet of the self, who aspires thus towards becoming whole again. This explains the ardour with which the protagonists seek one another, desire one another and define themselves to others through the prohibited choices they make, assuming their love which becomes *hybris* in the face of strict social norms, defying customs and disrespecting the pre-established order. Similar to any crisis, forbidden love – misalliance, in both texts, the reason for the *prohibition* – is bound to create chaos and will eventually impose a new order, which will inaugurate the freedom of the modern individual. Until then, however, the young lovers will have to challenge parental authority and the laws of the city.

Analysing the documents of the period, Constanța Ghițulescu notes: “The entire matrimonial politics is in the hands of the head of the family and he exerts his authority both on his daughters and his sons. They must listen and obey the father’s choice.” “When it comes to contesting paternal authority, daughters come first. [...] Escaping such tutelage is only a short-term illusion, since society is built around male authority and female obedience. A rebellious girl will only briefly enjoy the freedom she has obtained for herself, while punishment and dishonour are often harder to bear than obedience itself.”²² However, the stories of Aretusa

¹⁹ In the original, “apoi avea și duh mult, că-i năștea capul lucruri care nu numai că altul învățat nu să pricepea a le izvodii,” *La storia di Filerot...*, ed. cit., p. 221 și p. 231.

²⁰ In the original, “Frumusețe, -nțelepciune,/ Vorbă, duh și isteciuine.” In *Poezii Văcărești*, edited by Elena Piru, Bucharest: E. P. L., 1961, p. 333.

²¹ Wisdom and love, the text argues, become incompatible, because, metamorphosing under the impact of lust, “the lover, as wise as he may be, wanders around like a madman.”

²² “Întreaga politică matrimonială se află în mâinile șefului familiei, iar autoritatea lui se impune, fie că este vorba de fiucele sale, fie că este vorba de fiii săi. Aceștia trebuie să asculte și să se supună alegerii tatălui”. „Fetele se află pe primul loc atunci când este vorba de contestarea autorității paterne [...] Evadarea de sub această tutelă nu se dovedește decât o iluzie de scurtă durată, pentru că societatea este construită în jurul autorității masculine și al supunerii feminine. O fată rebelă nu se bucură de libertatea obținută decât pentru scurt timp, iar sancțiunea și dezonoraarea sunt deseori mai grele decât supunerea însăși.” In Constanța Ghițulescu, *op. cit.*, p. 112 and p. 132.

and Anthusa highlight their very courage of not yielding to the pressures of social customs, regardless of the gravity of the punishment. The course of the two emperors' daughters, who in their struggle to obtain the right to freely choose, on the sole criterion of love, the men they are about to join in marriage, amounts, in fact, to a retrieval of the stages in their becoming women. There is an intense, strong femininity, self-confident about its own qualities and spiritual drive, seeking to assert itself, and resisting absurd and crippling norms; it is, in fact, a social force that must be acknowledged in a society where marriage is a contract, an "agreement" between the parents, which the would-be groom partakes of but the would-be bride is not even consulted upon.²³ That is the very reason why the girl who dares make her own choices and fall in love is regarded as "the most lecherous"; "forsaking her honour" entails her being "mocked and scoffed by the entire world."²⁴

The outrage of Empress Euthalia, who heartlessly harangues her daughter, Anthusa, invoking the public opinion and "the way of the world," is peremptory: "balance your mind and don't let yourself overcome with illusion, don't yield to desire, don't crave for things which are not fit for your age or your honesty, but solely keep this in mind: when all the other emperors' daughters hear about your doings and actions, you will be faced with all the dishonour and shame you can bear; they will all want to cast you as a madwoman, and laugh at you, for there is no thing they will overlook as mere error, but as the most disgraceful, which not even your servants will stoop to; especially so since despite your dishonour, we will also fall prey to the way of the world, for, as it were, we have failed to master our daughter; therefore, I'm telling you, forget the path you have chosen, as it is the wrong path, come to your senses and put it into your own head that you are doing the wrong thing."²⁵ The solution, presented in the form of a splendid allegory by Ruxandra, Anthusa's companion,²⁶ is however no longer accessible to the young woman, who has been afflicted by the "disease" called the "fire of passion"²⁷ or by the "sin of being under the spell of Filerot's love."²⁸

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 130.

²⁴ *La storia di Filerot...*, ed. cit., p. 349, 354 and 355

²⁵ In the original, "cumpănește-ți mîntea și nu te lăsa să te biruiască amăgirea, nu te supune pofții, nici pofți lucruri ce nu sunt nici de vîrsta-ți, nici de cinste-ți, ci numai aciasta a pune în gînd: cînd vor auzi celelalte fete de împărați de cele ce faci și din faptele tale, poate să ți să întample cîtă necinste și rușine vei să aibi; cu adevărat toate vor să te ție de neună și toate vor să răză de tine, pentru că nu iaste lucru ce-l poate suferi drept greșeală, ci este cel mai de rușine, care nici slujnicile tale nu urmează; mai vîrtos că pã lângă necinstea ta vom să întrăm și noi în catigoria lumii, că adecă n-am fost harnici a stăpâni o fată, ci iată și acum îț zic lasă ceia ce ai apucat, că nu sunt bine, vine-ți în simțire și singură te socotește că nu faci bine."

²⁶ "Again, only you, your highness, wise and reasonable as you are, may cast your fishing rod of wisdom into the mouth of deception and pull it, like a delusive and deceptive fish, out of the bed of willingness and into the pit of abandonment, to stop it from spreading its deceitful wings inside the jaws of rationality, as only thus will you heal yourself" (*Ibidem*, p. 328).

²⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 205-207.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 327.

Each of the interpellated girl's answers, entailing her defensive self-positioning in the face of her accusers, becomes a gesture of introspection and amounts to a self-portrait outlined under the aegis of wonder and of the impossibility to change what she realises has been a mistake but she nonetheless assumes with the self-sufficient and vainglorious serenity of a woman in love: “Oh, sister Ruxandra, don't let yourself deluded under the impression that having been bestowed upon with all gifts of erudition and full knowledge, I have, all of a sudden, let go of my wits...” or “My beloved mother and lady [...] I do confess that I have taken the wrong path, but what can I do? Love has blinded me, desire has conquered me, there's no hope for healing ...”.²⁹ Moreover, love is assumed faithfully and consistently, without any trace of disavowal, to the ultimate sacrifice.

There is no threat that can intimidate these heroines, there is no persecution that can persuade them to relinquish their forbidden and reproved love. As a means of correction, Aretusa is thrown into prison, while Anthusa is confined in a convent. The result of forced seclusion is an exacerbation of their feelings, which is due not only to the prohibition imposed upon them, but also to the fact that rather than making them more vulnerable, the test strengthens the protagonists, reinforcing their confidence in themselves and in their own decisions. Anthusa appears to be lamenting herself in verse; however, “reassured of Filerot's love,” she does nothing but state her final choice once again: “For love with war/ Has injured me and I want him all the more so/ No other is to my liking;/ Either allow me to be his wife/ Or cut me into morsels while I'm still alive/ 'Cause I am still in need/[...]/ This what I have decided,/ Whether handsome or ugly,/ I crave for him to be my master/ Otherwise put me to my death/ And let everything desert me.”³⁰ Counsel, threats or exemplary narratives are also futile, as she says: “And while I am still alive/ You may tell me thousands of stories/ For they may help me not.”³¹

Tradition, she seems to be suggesting, has lost its capacity to adapt to immediate reality. The times have changed, and so have their heroes. Traditions, therefore, must follow suit and be changed too; a new code of norms is required, since parental and social authority is being replaced by the authority of feeling. Aretusa's lament to Erotocrit is relevant in this sense: “And because of your love my father and my mother hounded me, but I had you for a father and a mother, and only for your love did I put on a peasant's coat and forsake my kingdom.”³² If in

²⁹ In the original, “Ah soro Ruxandra, nu te prinză mirare că ce mă aflu cu toate darurile învățăturii împodobită și cu deplină știință m-am lunecat cu firea așa deodată...”; “Iubita mea maică și stăpână [...] eu singură cunosc că rea cale am apucat, dar ce să fac? Dragostea m-au orbit, pofta m-au biruit, nădejde de leuire nu iaste...” *Ibidem*, p. 333 and p. 351.

³⁰ In the original, “Că dragostea cu războiul/ M-au rănit, și-l voi învoi/ Altul nu-mi iaste pă voe;/ Ori dați-mi-l de soție/ Ori tăiați-mă de vie/ Că eu tot sunt în nevoe/[...]/ Ceia ce am hotărât./ Fie frumos sau urât./ Eu de stăpân îl poftesc/ Sau măcar dați-mi o moarte/ Să mă părăsească toate.”

³¹ In the original, “Iar când voi mai fi eu vie,/ Istorii să-mi spu o mie,/ Nu-mi poate da folosire”, *ibidem*, pp. 356-357.

³² In the original, “Și pentru dragoste ta m-au urgisit tatăl meu și maica-mè, dar eu pre tine te avèm tată și maică, și eu pentru dragostè ta am îmbrăcat / sucman; și m-am lepădat de împărăție pentru dragostè ta.” In *Cărțile populare...*, ed. cit., pp. 77-78.

the immediate reality of the Romanian eighteenth century, the young lovers are still constrained by the laws of the city and the church to comply with their parents' expectations to the detriment of their heart's voice, the situation is quite different at the cautionary and compensatory level of popular books. The characters' unalterable determination, their persistence, their faith in love's power to change the world and its calcified norms enable them to prevail and to enforce the pre-eminence of feeling. The happy ending of both romances can be said to endorse the emergence of modernity's social and cultural changes.

Moreover, in MS. Rom. no. 3514, written in Bucharest by chancellor Ioniță and illustrated by chancellor Petrache, the romance ends by emphasising this very mutation, history's exemplary character and the newly gained status of the protagonists, who have been faithful to their love: "Aretusa became mistress and mother to her sons. And for this reason life has not been wasted, nor has its flame dwindled. For the plenteous and beautifully blossoming tree shall sprout even amongst thorns, and nothing shall stay its way. This is the way of unalterable love, for many rewards for their great suffering were offered to them and heir wedding was completed. And each of them has now learned, in their own way, to be aware of their needs and not let them go to seed, but forever keep their hope..."³³

The manuscript illustrated by chancellor Petrache is remarkable also through the extremely valuable miniatures it is illuminated with. A work of art attesting to chancellor Petrache's talent, as well as to the artistic sensibility of the period, these miniatures are also an important record of that time, as they depict the atmosphere of the end of the eighteenth century in Romania, its luxurious interiors, sumptuous garments, portraits and relations between the protagonists. Expanding upon the text's substance, hermeneutically augmenting its meanings, and transposing them into an alternative and complementary iconographic language,³⁴ the miniatures which adorn the pages of manuscript no. 3514, B.A.R., București, speak, once again, about the need of medieval man to duplicate words by means of images, to make words more concrete and discern their meanings, anticipating

³³ "Stăpână și mumă s-au făcut Aretuza asupra fiilor săi. Și de acestu înțelept nu se pierde viața nici de cum de patima lui. Căci copaciul cel cu bun rod și frumos înflorit, și în mărăcini se va naște, nimic nu-i strică. Aceasta este dragostea cea credincioasă, că multe răsplătiri cu nevoi mari li-au dat și nunta li s-au isprăvit. Și fieștecare unde ce au învățat acum să cunoască și prin nevoi să nu se piarză, ci totdeauna nădejde să aibă."

³⁴ For a theory of images, their reception and functionality in the Middle Ages, see also François Garnier, *Le langage de l'Image au Moyen Âge. Signification et Symbolique*, Paris: Le Léopard d'or, 1982, Michel Dufrenne, *L'Œil et l'Oreille*, Paris: Jean Michel Place, 1991, Georges Didi-Huberman, *Devant l'Image*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1990, Régis Debray, *Vie et mort de l'image. Une histoire du regard en Occident*, Paris: Gallimard, 1992, Sixten Ringbom, *De l'icone à la scène narrative*, Paris: Gérard Montfort, 1997 (original English edition, 1965), Hans Belting, *Image et culte. Une histoire de l'image avant l'époque de l'art*, Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1998 (original German edition, 1990), Hans Belting, *L'image et son public au Moyen Âge*, Paris: Gérard Montfort, 1998 (original German edition, 1981), and Georges Didi-Huberman, *Devant le temps. Histoire de l'art et anachronisme des images*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2000.

thus, through a genuine passion for significant details, the visual challenges of the future centuries.³⁵ This is also what we have here. Insofar as Erotocrit’s love story may be said to acquire a local colour, it is significant that chancellor Petrache’s depiction of Aretusa (f.2v) in 1787 uses carefully individualised social landmarks, adapts the text as regards its idiomatic language and historical background and places the female protagonist in an ordinary peasant setting, as she sits on a bench covered with a colourful carpet, between two pitchers filled with flowers. However, the illustration of this “generic” scene also has a fundamental visual detail that pinpoints the girl’s imperial birth and the exact space she belongs to (including her placement in time): next to a heraldic imperial symbol located in the inferior register, on the right side of the image, there appears, in a symmetrical mirror image on the left side, Wallachia’s coat of arms with the two-headed eagle supporting the crown.

Providing a frontal representation of the heroine, in her unquestionable stateliness, with a dreamy gaze directed towards the future, her head slightly tilted to the left, clad according to the fashion of the day, this full page portrait also features a detail reminiscent of religious painting: to suggest her uniqueness and exemplarity, the character is positioned on a pillow, after the model of “Virgin Mary enthroned.”³⁶ This is the image of incipient, assumed femininity, whose pursuit is apparently suggested by her open arms, in expectation. As a matter of fact, the significance of her gestures is extremely important, as it conveys the feelings and the relations between the characters. From the over two hundred miniatures, we shall focus our attention on three of them, which describe Aretusa, either alone or accompanied by someone else. In full agreement with the text they illustrate and, implicitly, interpret, by transposing it into a different artistic language, each of the three miniatures highlights a particular detail of the love story. Empathising with the feelings and the status of the young woman in love, who inhabits a social space whose traditional norms she infringes, chancellor Petrache uses his talent and artistic insight in conveying meaning *via* the *positioning of the characters* and their *significant gestures*. The image of Aretusa deploring her misery (f.11v.), in an extremely suggestive position that betrays, even at a physical level, her self-absorption and harassment by the inflexible, conventional demands of those around her, draws attention not only through the fact that the miniaturist succeeds in expressing the protagonist’s state of mind; it is also remarkable given the young woman’s eloquent gesture of wiping her tears with the handkerchief she

³⁵ To remain in the field of *word-image relations*, I must also draw attention to Paul Zumthor’s commentary, *La mesure du monde*, ed. cit., pp. 267-268, which analyses the evolution of the manuscripts comprising Marco Polo’s voyage: thus, while the oldest manuscript had no illustrations, the next ones have only a few miniatures dating back to around 1350; in time, however, their number grows steadily, reaching almost two hundred at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Zumthor concludes that this growth is meant “to allow the reader to make the transfer from text to vision, and to instruct through feeling.”

³⁶ See also G.Popescu-Vilcea, *Erotocritul Logofătului Petrache*, Bucharest: Meridiane Publishing House, 1977, p. 7.

holds in her right hand, while her left palm is raised as a sign of refusal and firm opposition, expressing once more her decision of not yielding under pressure.

To continue with this idea, it is worth mentioning the miniature where Arethusa confesses to Frosina, her nursemaid (f.22v). Against a majestic background, we may notice the miniaturist's deployment of the perspective technique, through his exploitation of the columns' architectural detail; this suggests a simultaneously royal and mysterious atmosphere, where the two characters participating in the dialogue appear to be physically separated, which reinforces the idea of separation also at the level of the opinions they express. The focal point of the reader's gaze is again the protagonist's expressive and significant gesture: this time, Aretusa raises her right hand with the forefinger lifted and pointing towards herself, in an answer to her nursemaid's prohibiting gesture. Aretusa's self-conscious and self-reliant assertion, her own gesture of both introspection and "pointing" at the other, her decision to foreground herself and fight against any potential sanction, these are all answered in the miniature representing Emperor Eraclie, Empress Artemi, Aretusa and Frosina, in a pavilion, during a tournament.

With his left hand raised and pointing his forefinger, the emperor conveys the implacable laws of the city, their compulsory nature. Contextually, the attitudes of both the Empress and the nursemaid are coherent: gently leaning with their faces, bodies and gaze towards the emperor, they express their absolute consent to the norms he upholds. Aretusa, however, looks in the opposite direction, probably towards the place where Erotocrit should be fighting, and grasps in her arms the crown she might wish to bestow upon him. The gap between the two categories is obvious: they cannot seek reconciliation unless either of the parties relinquishes its principles. Aretusa's attitude firmly expresses that she is not the one who is going to give up. True love, the text of the two romances appears to suggest, will overcome any vicissitude. The two couples of lovers reinforce this idea. The miniature depicting the emperor Eraclie ceding his throne to Erotocrit and Aretusa (f.214v) illustrates this also at the level of the artistic image. Presented frontally, the three protagonists who are sitting on the imperial throne have achieved reconciliation. The proof resides in the Emperor's paternal gesture, who looks at Erotocrit, his right hand touching the latter's shoulder, as a sign of acknowledgement, and with his left hand holding Erotocrit's right hand, as if transferring his power to him. All of this is happening before Aretusa's eyes; she is here both a witness and an active protagonist who, content and happy, attends, practically, the recognition that there has been a shift between generations, that congealed conceptions have been displaced, and that there has been a change of paradigm which legitimates the individual's right to freedom and emancipation from the obsolete laws of the city.

The four protagonists' entire love history is directly associated with the climate of ongoing changes affecting the social and cultural paradigm from the end

of the eighteenth century. The time of crisis, defined here by forbidden love, has its counterpart in certain symbolic spatial categories. Unlike in the previous centuries, the space of choice is no longer either the *hermit's space for prayer*, or the *sage's chambers of the mind*, or even the *hero's world at large*, where the latter was put to test – but “*the leaves of the heart*,” seen as a sort of affective *anima mundi* that encompasses all the secrets and desires in the universe.

Besides the habitual *loci communes* of the courtly romances, such as the emperor's court (a hierarchic, orderly, law-giving centre), the girl's chamber (a *topos* of prohibition), or the tournament (as a place of election and a time of demonstrating exemplary virtues), the Romanian versions attempt to adapt the narrative as much as possible to Romanian realities; they also explore the meanings of a new symbolical architectural form, in perfect correspondence with the feelings of the young lovers, who apparently long for defining themselves in relation to this representative architecture of the age: the *gazebo*. Although it is similar to the Oriental kiosk and the Western pavilion, the *gazebo*, which is also somewhat synonymous with the traditional veranda, individualises the Romanian text through an image borrowed from the fairy-tale universe: “in the middle of a garden [...] in the middle of a basin,” the building has walls of “painted crystal.”³⁷ The double circuitous circumference of Erotocrit's pavilion means that it is both a secure and securing *topos*; furthermore, it synthesizes the attributes of the garden and the water (basin), becoming thus a shelter for feelings and an occasion for their materialization into words (the lyrics written on the walls) and images (Aretusa's portrait).

A love chronotope by definition, the *gazebo* follows a centripetal path towards its innermost secret core, which is the face of the beloved one (the girl's portrait is kept in a cabinet locked with a silver key, in a golden chest, “encrusted with rubies and diamonds,” which is itself locked with a golden key, etc.). The *gazebo* is, ultimately, a metaphor of the lovers' interiority. Aretusa's example is explicit – “that kiosk, which is to say Erotocrit's love, was well-grounded in the heart which had so gladly embedded it.”³⁸ Entailing a time for invoking the other and focusing upon the self, the *gazebo* also becomes a space for self-introspection and for deciphering the meanings of the erotic encounter.

The fragment from the *History of Filerot and Anthusa* conveys further meanings. Salvaged from a shipwreck, but cast ashore onto a “deserted heath” and scrutinising the horizon for a point of reference (there is an insistence on visual occurrences in the text), Filerot noticed “a very big and beautiful *gazebo*, clad in copper and painted on the inside, but there was no one to be seen either in or around it. So he went inside to see who had painted it and gazed upon some letters; upon reading them, he realised the *gazebo* had been built by Solomon the Emperor

³⁷ In the original, “în mijlocul grădinii [...] în mijlocul a unui havuz”, the building has walls „di crișstal zugrăviți.”

³⁸ In the original, “fiind atâta de-ntemeiat chioșcul acela, adică dragostea lui Erotocrit în inima ce [I]-au răsădit cu atâta bucurie.”

and that each and every painting had its own history, which also showed its meaning through the letters it was written in.”³⁹

In the overall context, the new symbolic architecture is built like a *mise en abyme* of the entire narrative; it is a *topos* that discloses “the meaning of history,” triggering inevitably a time for deciphering it. If we consider the fact that in heraldry, whence Gide borrowed the term, *abyme* designates the centre of the emblem, the meaning of the fragment also becomes, if we are to remain in the same field of armorial terminology, the novel’s *blazon*, where *blazon* refers strictly to the verbal formula or to the word that accompanies an image, decrypting (or enciphering) it.⁴⁰ By reading the “meanings,” Filerot becomes aware of his feelings and metamorphoses under the impact of love: the story allegorically changes his face from white to black, just like in the other narrative, where Aretusa sees her painted portrait and understands the meaning of Erotocrit’s lyrics, experiencing “a quick burning fire that has been lit in her heart [...] since from that hour [...] her days have been restless.”⁴¹ On the one hand, the fragment depicting the moment of Filerot’s transfiguration conveys the moral of the romance: love changes and betters the individual, after a series of trials pertaining to the erotic ritual. On the other hand, the reference to Solomon, the wise author of *The Song of Songs* as the supreme canonical reference for romantic literature, sets the text in the line of an illustrious ancestry in the literary history of the world.

The miniature that adorns the pages of manuscript no. 4766, B.A.R., Bucharest provides an exemplary instance of the toponymy of the gazebo as a love metaphor, where the young lover overcomes all the obstacles entailed by her erotic initiation.

Distinguishing itself through its architectural details, the gazebo is set in a circle – a securing space, perfectly centred in a repetitive temporality. A circular edifice itself, the gazebo welcomes the world through its entrance, which is set in an archway where Aretusa is waiting, and through the two windows, whose shutters are opened.

³⁹ In the original, “că să aleasă un foișor foarte mare și frumos învălit cu aramă și înlăuntru zugrăvit, dar nici într-însul să vedea cinevași, nici împrejurul lui. Deci, întră înlăuntru să vază de cine e zugrăvit și văzu la un loc niște slove, care cetindu-le văzu că iaste făcut de Solomon împărat și fieștecare zugrăveală avea istoria ei, carele prin slovele ce era scrisă arăta și noima istorii.”

⁴⁰ For details concerning the terminology and art of medieval armouries, see also G. J. Brault, *Early Blazon. Heraldic Terminology in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries with Special Reference to Arthurian Literature*, Oxford, 1972, R. Viel, *Les Origines symboliques du blason*, Paris: PUF, 1972, A. M. Barstow, *A Lexicographical Study of Heraldic Terms in Anglo-Norman Rolls of Arms (1300-1350)*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1974, *Genealogica et Heraldica. Recueil du XIVe congrès international des sciences généalogique et héraldique* (Copenhagen, 1980), Copenhagen, 1981, Michel Pastoureau, *Traité d’heraldique*, Paris: Éditions Picard, 1993, Michel Pastoureau, *Figures de l’heraldique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), Michel Pastoureau, *Les Emblèmes de la France*, Paris: Éditions Bonneton, 1998 and Michel Pastoureau, *Une histoire symbolique du Moyen Âge occidental*, Paris: La Librairie du XXIe siècle, 2003.

⁴¹ In the original, “s-au aprins în inema ei ca un foc iute arzând [...] și dintr-acelel ceas [...] zia bună n-a mai văzut.”

The symbolism of the window was vastly explored in the Middle Ages. Its visual importance is repeatedly pointed out in *The Erotocrit* by chancellor Petrache. The window is a transitional frame between the exterior and the interior, obstructing or facilitating the inside-outside connection, and filtering reality in respect to the viewer’s position.⁴² For the author of the miniature, the window also acquires an unusual temporal function: on the left side of the image, beyond the window, there are two instances of Anthusa, symbolizing two different attitudes in two distinct stages of the love ritual; they suggest thus the chronology of the “phenomenon”: fainting-suffering-prohibition, which are placed in the past on a diachronic axis. To these a third scene is added – Antusa at present, waiting before the steps – another significant detail. Enigmatically displayed, the future – signalled by the window on the right – retrieves suspense also at the level of the text’s imagery.

The illustration seems to emphasise the fact that love, in all its sequential evolution, tends to defy temporal laws. The sun and the moon – as cosmic witnesses – come into sight simultaneously: this is a space where contraries coexist, where contradictions are cancelled, and where love places its protagonists, who are capable of never relinquishing their love and doing whatever lies in their power to be together despite all parental and social constraints, on an atemporal level, *sub specie aeternitas*. That is the very reason why love remains the sole viable – and, possibly, the most expressive – ontological and gnosiological solution of the century, foreshadowing the heyday of Romanticism.

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⁴² For the motif of the “filtered gaze”, see also Victor Ieronim Stoichiță, *Efectul Don Quijote. Repere pentru o hermeneutică a imaginărilor europene*, Bucharest: Humanitas, 1995, pp. 252-278.

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Southern Identity with Flannery O'Connor

Iulia Andreea Blănuță - *Southern Cultural Dimensions in Flannery O'Connor's Fiction*. Iulia Andreea Blănuță. Iași: Universitas XXI, 2008. 302 pp.

Flannery O'Connor's name is representative for the Southern American literary universe of the twentieth century. And this is owed to the bewildering craft of capturing the spirit of the South, of her homeland. Her work seizes the attention of the reading public through astonishing and shocking representations of reality. The religious, Christian approach towards life is an illustrative feature of her writings. What is more, it can be said that her works are endowed with cathartic ends in the sense that she offers a poignant, ruthless, sometimes appalling image of reality, of the world to her readers.

Romanian critics like Virgil Stanciu, Ștefan Stoenescu and Irina Adăscăliței Chirica have showed special interest to this Southern American writer. Virgil Stanciu in his work *Orientări în literatura sudului American* manages to shed light on the true meaning and message of Flannery O'Connor's writings. He emphasizes the fact that she was a "catholic novelist" who lived in a protestant region and insists on the strong relation that exists between O'Connor's fiction and reality. Moreover, in this work he emphasizes the deterministic aspect of the social, regional context that left an indisputable mark on her works. Flannery O'Connor has been sometimes criticized for her bluntness and shocking manner of describing violence, of emphasizing the process of annihilation that the Southern society and the traditional values were going through. However, her acknowledged literary and cultural contribution is an indisputable fact. According to Virgil Stanciu and the

mentioned work, Flannery O'Connor's novels and short stories do not step out from the chronological and psychological conventions; she does not appeal to any other innovative techniques in what concerns these aspects. Christian morals and precepts permeate her writings, thing which is in perfect agreement with the essential aspect of the southern literary tradition.

Furthermore, Irina Adăscăliței Chirica states, in her article entitled "Flannery O'Connor- imaginea obsedantă a sudului American" published in the literary magazine *Convorbiri Literare* in October 1997, that Flannery O'Connor's work can be included within the sphere of the term "literary regionalism" but, above all, her writings tackle issues that concern directly the human condition. In addition, this literary critic also mentions the writer's objectivity in what concerns her depictions of reality, the naturalistic influence and also the sharp style. She also refers to the fact that O'Connor's characters often have mystic experiences that occur in key moments of their everyday life when the sacred reveals itself in reality. They all try to discover the mystery that lays hidden in the simplicity of normal life, of things.

Southern Cultural Dimensions in Flannery O'Connor's Fiction by Iulia Andreea Blănuță is an exhaustive presentation and analysis of the literary works of this writer. This literary critic emphasizes the tight connection that exists between this author, her works and the social, cultural and regional context in which Flannery O'Connor lived. These elements, aspects are dependable on one another and their unity created a

literary personality of unquestionable value who is emblematic for the Southern American literature. This work of critique has 302 pages and is structured in 5 chapters, having also an introduction and conclusions; each chapter has several subchapters. The introduction focuses on the setting of the four dimensions that characterize the Southern mind and identity from a cultural point of view and which are significant for a comprehensive understanding of this writer's work: space, time, social context and religion.

The first chapter of the book deals with the dimensions of culture and literary representations. The Southern culture and literature are given a thorough presentation with special emphasis on their individualizing traits with which history has endowed them within time. "Flannery O'Connor is also a writer who considers that writing is a matter of vision, which in its turn, is tributary to the home country of the writer" considering this statement, the critic manages to analyze the manner in which this particular culture has created a literary personality.

Space and time are the two elements that the next two chapters focus on. Thus Iulia Andreea Blănuță shows the close connection between the Southern mind, culture and "the land, as space of cultural formation" that "is a permanence which enhances the sense of belonging". From this point of view Flannery O'Connor's landscapes are the landscapes of her home country, Georgia and are the witnesses of the scenes of violence and frightening experiences that the strange and grotesque characters undergo. What is more, these cruel scenes influence in a negative way these particular landscapes which are described by the southern author as being hostile, oppressing and confining spaces. In addition, these spaces and the elements that populate their reality reveal the sacred that shows itself in the simplicity of reality. Furthermore, the critic focuses on the issue of time and the American mind, proving that the southerner

has often forged, fictionalized a past in a way that suited one's ideas of honor and pride at a certain moment. Tradition is of great importance and by creating a past that often contradicts the historical facts, the southerner created an identity. In this sense, the Civil War, taken as a turning point in the history of this American region, is mentioned in Flannery O'Connor's short story *A late encounter with the enemy* and the author shows the way in which the individual uses, alters the past, history in order to correspond with one's present needs. Many of O'Connor's characters are representatives of the Old South that do not want to conform to the passing of time. By forging the past they try to create their own history thing which contradicts with God's will that is why in the end they are harshly punished.

The next chapter is centered on the analysis of the social aspect of the South and of the manner in which it is reflected in the writer's works. Misfits, non-conformists, outsiders, displaced intellectuals are only few of the labels that can be attributed to the characters, that are referred to as distorted characters, of this southern writer: "each and every feature in her writings is a double quest: a social quest that attempts at defining the identity of a person within the social milieu, with the requirements of the community, with the tradition and also with the promises of progress and science." Thus, O'Connor's characters find themselves trapped between the demands of the past, present and future, trying to find their identity. Racial and family relationships, hierarchy are some of the issues that Iulia Andreea Blănuță analyzes in this chapter. The critic describes the way in which the writer draws the attention of the readers to the problems, the short-comings of the sinful and degraded society through violent, shocking scenes and characters. Thus violence proves to be a redeeming force.

Furthermore, the next chapter deals with the aspect of religion that is emblematic

for the Southern American culture and for O'Connor's works. Her stories are often concerned with depicting Christian rituals like baptism and sacrifice because she believes that through these sacraments the individual will find the path towards God. Religion, faith seems to be the solution for a sinful, uprooted and disillusioned world. Moving further, the critic also discusses the grotesque as a literary trait of O'Connor's writings that can be detected at the level of the deformed characters and the bizarre, often fearsome, experiences they undergo. However, the religious perspective of the author proposes a solution that comes

through redemption and "her comic approach" suggests optimism.

Iulia Andreea Blănuță concludes that through her critical work she attempts to integrate the paradoxical and ambiguous fictional universe of Flannery O'Connor into a coherent image of "the Southern identity" through the acceptance of these paradoxes, conflicts as actual integrated parts of the Southern American culture.

ANDREEA GIANINA BERA

An Indian Approach to Classical and Modern Literature

The Atlantic Critical Review, vol. 8, no. 3 and 4, 2010

The Atlantic Critical Review is a magazine published quarterly in New Delhi, India since 2002 and sponsored by Atlantic Publishers and Distributors (P) Ltd., New Delhi, India. The Indian editorial staff is doubled by an international advisory editorial board, comprising contributors from Europe, the U.S.A., Australia and Canada among whom: Michaela Mudure (University of Cluj, Romania), Sabine Bucholz (University of Koln, Germany), Ralph Crane (University of Tasmania, Australia), Douglas Killam (University of Guelph, Canada) and Gerlinde Sanford (University of Syracuse, U.S.A.).

The Atlantic Critical Review was initiated in order to provide a forum where young scholars could publish their works in English.

The articles published in Volume 8, Numbers 3 and 4 of the magazine are thorough analyses of several well-known literary pieces by English and American authors, including P.B. Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory* and *The End of the Affair* as well as by

some Indian authors like Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land*, Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* or R.K. Narayan's *My Days* and by African ones: Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* or those of Dambudzo Marechera: *The House of Hunger* and *Black Sunlight*.

Amid the most interesting articles is "Re-membering Selves: Being and Writing in R.K. Narayan's *My Days*" (pag. 50 – 64, Number 3) by Amit Bhattacharya, which focuses on the Indian writer's autobiography, emphasizing the way in which his life experiences and the people he met served as sources of inspiration for his writings. Referring to Narayan's autobiography, the author of the article states that although it does not present Narayan's life in a strictly chronological manner, it is valuable however, because it explicates its author's aesthetics and situates his oeuvre.

The article gives a brief recount of the autobiography while highlighting the most important moments of Narayan's life, those which shaped his consciousness, character and career as a writer: his childhood and the time he spent in Malgudi that later on became

integral to his aesthetics; the school years and the people: parents, teachers, schoolmates and domestic staff who inhabited his world at that time and who are given a special place in his autobiography; his failure in the university entrance examination which offered him the necessary time to enrich his readings; his life as a student at Maharaja College and his dislike with the surrounding scenery which he considered detrimental to the “scholarly concentration”; the ups and downs of his life after graduation while struggling to establish himself as a writer; his brief but happy and beautiful conjugal life alongside his sweetheart Rajam and his shattered dreams after her sudden death; his breakthrough with the novel *The Bachelor of Arts* which consolidated his place as a novelist and the launch of *Indian Thought*, a quarterly publication with focus on literature, philosophy and culture; the Rockefeller Foundation award that permitted him an “escape” from India to the United States. The last chapter of the autobiography recreates the “autumn years” of the author’s life and attempts a round off of his narrative.

The introduction is a brief review of the various aspects of the term ‘autobiography’: its etymology, autobiography as a genre and a short history of it starting from St. Augustine’s *Confessions* (4th century A.D.) which are considered the first of this genre, also mentioning names such as Benvenuto Cellini, Jean Jacques Rousseau, John Stuart Mill, Virginia Woolf or Nelson Mandela whose works present their author-narrators’ quests for identity.

As I mentioned above, the article concentrates on the manner in which Narayan’s own experiences, the events he lived and the people from his entourage influenced his writings. After the introduction with its focus on the various meanings of autobiography, whose purpose is to prepare the reader for the follow up, Bhattacharya gradually unfolds the autobiography which he interrupts with exemplifying comments that show how a particular event in Narayan’s life,

certain persons and places became later part of his novels in the form of characters and settings. In a certain way, Narayan translated reality into fiction. While discussing his university years, the Indian author sketches the portraits of some of his professors. His memory of these teachers and his own experience of teaching at a government school helped Narayan portray some of the most remarkable teachers in his novels: Dr. Pillai, Vedanayakam and Ebenezer in *Swami and Friends* or Prof. Ragavachar and Prof. Brown in *The Bachelor of Arts*. In a similar way, a severe drought in Mysore provided the Indian author with the setting for novel *The Guide*.

Bhattacharya succeeds in creating a discourse which flows smoothly through the meanders of Narayan’s autobiography and which stops from time to time only to embrace a new aspect worth of attention in the author’s opinion. The discourse itself is sprinkled here and there with quotes from Narayan’s autobiography as well as from other authors’ and critics’ works on autobiography (Doris Lessing, Marcus Moseley, Peter Abbs) or on Narayan’s *My Days*. The role of these quotes is to support Bhattacharya’s arguments and to provide the reader with a better insight into Narayan’s work.

The main theme of Prashant Mishra’s article, “Postmodernism as a Strategy Used in Studying Postcolonial Discourse” (pag. 127 – 134, Number 3) is post-colonialism as opposed to colonialism and the way in which postmodernism can be used to read and interpret postcolonial texts. The article begins with a presentation of the two terms and of their ramifications: postcolonial studies, postcolonial poetics and of their field of study. It also shows how the colonial perspective, centered on the colonizer as the dominant voice, while placing the colonized and everything related to them: country, traditions, culture on an inferior position, as well as the colonial texts that described the colonial powers as divine beings, came to be questioned and regarded with suspicion during the two world wars due to the blood shed and

violence, the massive and unjustified killings of the innocent. This atmosphere of distrust led to the emergence of Postmodernism which rejects all types of domination and absolutism. Instead, it prefers and foregrounds the other, the marginal, the colonized. Postmodern methods are employed in postcolonial poetics which questions colonial ideology and which is influenced by Derrida's method of decentering the colonizers and their privileged position.

In tackling the two terms, colonialism and post-colonialism, in opposition, the author of the article manages to clearly show the difference between the two perspectives, their opposing meanings and implications in politics, culture, literature and everyday life. The article gives definitions of the terms (colonialism, post-colonialism, postcolonial studies, postmodernism), explains the appearance and evolution of postmodernism and its influence upon postcolonial poetics and texts as a need to deconstruct a too powerful and domineering center and shows how postcolonial studies came to encompass in its canvass a large number of fields "where only one dominant voice was heard while the other one was suppressed". The article is a theoretical one. It is well structured and easy to read due to its author's almost didactic manner of presenting and explaining the issues.

If the previous article focuses on the way in which post-colonialism seeks to undermine the privileged position of the colonizer and its literature by giving attention to the margins, the last of the articles in Number 4, "Decentering Heterosexuality: Perspectives on Gay History and Identity" by Eliza Joseph (pag. 116-130), discusses homosexuality and the way in which it "attacks" and tries to dismantle the privileged position that heterosexuality occupies in our society. The author debates upon both aspects of homosexuality: gays and lesbians.

After she clearly states the purpose of her article, that is to highlight the diverse attitudes to homosexuality and to present the factors that sustain homophobia in the

contemporary world, E. Joseph explains the terms *homosexual*, *homosexuality* and *homophobia* according to "Webster's New World Dictionary" (1971 ed.) and to the definitions given to them by doctors and psychologists in the 19th and the 20th centuries. These definitions had all negative connotations, as this type of behavior was considered deviant and unproductive because it did not have procreation as a result.

In order to give the reader a comprehensive perspective upon homosexuality, E. Joseph traces its history back to its privileged position in classical Greece and ancient India where sexual practices between people of the same sex were regarded as natural. This kind of relationships was common in medieval Japan among the Samurai warriors and in the near East in harems. They also existed in Asia, Africa and the Americas. Then, Joseph enumerates the factors which contributed to the appearance of homophobia. Here, she identifies the triumph of Christianity in the late Roman Empire which brought with it the condemnation of homosexual practices, the 19th century medical theories about homosexuality and the Labouchere Amendment (1885) that sentenced homosexuals to prison. However, the economic and industrial development in the 19th century gave an impulse to the emergence of the homosexual identities because they created the proper climate that permitted a change in people's life and mentality. If male homosexual subcultures appeared in the 18th and 19th centuries, lesbianism emerged only in the 20th century. The last part of the article is a defense of lesbian identity and practices sustained by the opinions of some well-known feminists like Adrienne Rich, Nancy Chodorow or Audre Lorde.

In her article, Eliza Joseph successfully manages to give a place to homosexuality in the history of mankind by pointing to the most important moments and events that marked its history. One of the best aspects of the article is its presentation and analysis, in

parallel, of both male and female homosexual movements. By exposing the stereotypes that the heterosexual world uses to define the Other, the deviant, that is, the homosexual whether they speak of a man or of a woman, the article is finally a plea for tolerance and acceptance of another life style and perspective, which, although differs from the standard heterosexual orientation, should not be regarded as evil and thus disrespected and marginalized.

“A Stylistic Analysis of Graham Greene’s *The Power and the Glory* and *The End of the Affair*” by Ch. Gracelyn David (pag. 15-23) is an attempt to identify the main aspects of Greene’s style using as basis the two novels mentioned in the title of the article. David’s article is constructed in the form of an argumentative essay, in which the author, first states his opinions and then, sustains them with examples from the two texts. The author begins with the identification of the two categories of novels written by Greene: the stories that use the style of a fast moving action thriller and those which deal with the realities of life in which man is seen like a puppet whose stage is the world. G. David then comments on the aspect which sets Greene’s novels apart from those of his contemporaries: his reaffirmation of the ancient prerogative of the novelist to comment.

In order to discuss the novelist’s style G. David presents the two novels in parallel. She identifies the main traits of Greene’s style through the novels and explains their impact on the reader: accuracy of observation and expression; tauntness and economy; starkness; the cataloguing of details – a trait that is closely related to the cinematic technique; brevity, simplicity, terseness, wit and brilliance. According to G. David, Greene’s style is also remarkable for its polish and grace and his sayings have the value of proverbs.

Two elements characteristic to Greene’s novels have attracted G. David’s attention: his use of irony and of dreams. The role of dreams is to provide information and a deeper

insight into the inner life of the characters. David uses examples from the two novels to support her arguments. In doing so, she either retells the respective piece in her own words or provides significant quotations from the novels. G. David also argues that brevity, economy, precision and racy style are part of the cinematography technique and they can all be found in Greene’s novels, a reason why many of his novels have been made into films. The two novels she chooses to analyze have been made into films, too. David explains which qualities of Greene’s style have made possible and easy his novels’ translation into films.

The merit of G. David’s article is that of presenting in a synthetic way the main traits that make up Graham Greene’s style and of highlighting those aspects that render his novels open to a cinematic “career”. In a relatively brief article, the author succeeds in introducing the reader into some of the subtlest elements of a writer’s style which, many times may remain hidden even to a competent reader.

The articles gathered in issues no. 3 and 4 from Volume 8 of “The Atlantic Critical Review” analyze the works of several English, American, Indian and African writers. The essays succeed in capturing the most valuable and striking aspects of the pieces they analyze. The structure of the articles, the language employed by their authors and their content make them accessible to any reader, even to those who have no literary background emphasizing once again that the lack of extremely complicated literary jargon does not mean simplicity.

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The Portrayal of an Age: Elizabethan England

Percec, Dana, Andreea Șerban & Andreea Verțeș-Olteanu, *Anglia Elizabetană – Ghid de istorie culturală (Elizabethan England – A Cultural History Guide)*, Timișoara, Editura Eurostampa, 2010, 272p.

Anglia Elizabetană – Ghid de istorie culturală (Elizabethan England – A Cultural History Guide) is a book published by three scholars teaching at the Faculty of Letters, History and Theology in Timișoara. Dana Chetrinescu Percec has already published several works focused on Shakespearean theatre: *The Body's Tale. Some Ado About Shakespearean Identities* (2006), *Despre corp și ipostazele sale în teatrul shakespearian* (2008) and *Shakespeare and the Theatre. An Introduction* (2008). She is the co-author of several other volumes of Shakespearean studies. Andreea Șerban is the co-author of *Shakespeare's Plays. Semiar Topics* (2008) and she also published several articles on screenplays based on Shakespeare's plays. Andreea Verțeș-Olteanu is currently conducting a research for her PhD thesis on juridical aspects in William Shakespeare's comedies, from an interdisciplinary perspective.

During the last decades of the twentieth century, literary theory, philosophy, anthropology or architecture became more and more sensitive to contextual approaches in analysis. *New Historicism* (S. Greenblatt, M. Foucault), *contextualism* (K. DeRose, D. Lewis), *thick description* (C. Geertz) emerged and developed during this period, emphasizing the importance of context in criticism and analysis. The main purpose of this book, as stated in the introductory part, is to offer a detailed description of the Elizabethan period in order to facilitate new historicism approaches in analyzing Elizabethan authors. Arts and literature flourished considerably during Queen Elizabeth's reign and William Shakespeare's work became the main focus of historicist critics. Helping readers understand the paradigm dominating the age of Elizabethan

literary productions will facilitate gaining more valuable insights into the works of William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, Ben Johnson, John Lyly, Thomas Kid and others. Given the popularity of Shakespearean plays in Romania, we consider that a book in Romanian on the Elizabethan age is more than helpful both for scholars and the general public.

Anglia Elizabetană – Ghid de istorie culturală begins with a preamble where the authors state their intentions and the objectives of the book, followed by a short overview of the Elizabethan context.

The book is structured into nine chapters, each focusing on a major aspect of the Elizabethan society. Each chapter bears the title of the particular field it presents: *Economy and Society, Family, Geopolitics, Medical World, Religion and Folk Beliefs, Juridical System, Everyday Life, Cultural Life, Urban Life*. Some chapters have short references on how that particular aspect is to be found in Shakespeare's plays. The book ends with a brief summary of every chapter and an index making it easier for the readers to find the information of their interest.

The first chapter describes the economical measures and mechanisms which lead to England's prosperity during this period. It focuses on emerging crafts, taxation, military politics, industry and economical regulations of the time. Another relevant aspect regards the dual perception of the monarch going back to Plato's philosophy, the attributions of the Privy Council and the organization of the Royal Court.

The chapter dedicated to the Elizabethan family explains the multiple

implications of a well-established patriarchal society. Women's total submission to men influences social dynamics. The large number of illegitimate children during the period comes as a result of abuse and poverty. Women are stereotyped in different hypostasis: the nuisance or the object of erotic magic.

The chapter dedicated to Geopolitics explains in a clear logical manner the relationship between England and other countries: Scotland, Ireland, Spain as well as the relationship with the Islamic world and the African slave-trade. Medical practices, common diseases of the period, the attitude towards autopsies, mental health, the status of the doctor and the pharmacist, all these are described in the chapter dedicated to the medicine of the time.

Religion and Folk Beliefs is the richest chapter when it comes to understanding what mythological figures and superstitions influenced Shakespeare's characters. The reader will get familiarized to religious and occult practices of the period.

The juridical system of the time inherits feudal elements and adapts them to the social changes occurring during the Renaissance. The *Inns of Court*, the death penalty, the *Common Law*, heritage, the judge of peace or sexual discrimination in the juridical system of the epoch, all these are described in the sixth chapter.

The chapter dedicated to everyday life provides a series of interesting information ranging from fashion, manners, house holding, important social events, sports, hunting to sexual life. Fashion is carefully described, giving detailed information on how people of the period used to dress (clothing, colors, jewelry, and shoes) and how this reflected their social status and profession.

Cultural life flourished during the Elizabethan period. The Bible is now accessible to everyone, but still censorship reigns over printing. Chapter eight describes

the cultural context in which William Shakespeare wrote: the access to knowledge and education, the development of the sonnet and the theatre, the increasing demand for printed books and various other aspects. The last chapter depicts urban Elizabethan space with its commercial centers, brothels, taverns, political organization and lifestyle.

The book is highly informative and makes an easy reading. The discourse is concise and objective. It is a very useful reading for students beginning their study of Shakespeare and the Elizabethan period. Given the clear discourse it is accessible to the general public.

This book is part of a larger research project focused on the study of the Elizabethan period and William Shakespeare's works. This project initiated by the English Department of the Faculty of Letters, History and Theology in Timișoara materialized on December 10, 2010 with the inauguration of an international center dedicated to Shakespearean studies in Timișoara: *Centrul Internațional Shakespeare*.

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