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*** The contributors are solely responsible for the scientific accuracy of their articles.**

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Editor's Note

Volume 8 of *Cultural Intertexts* – a Journal of Literature, Cultural Studies and Linguistics – brings together articles which result from research carried out by specialists at home and abroad.

The common points of interest emerging from the authors' contributions are the representation of private and public selves, the politics behind the constructions of national, cultural and gender identity, as well as the more technical aspects of literary and filmic architectural design – with emphasis on experimentation, historiographic rewriting, intertextuality and the meta-dimension.

The corpus under the lens includes a series of novels (*What Maisie Knew*, *Rue with a Difference*, *American Psycho*, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *Naked Lunch*, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, *The Hours*, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*), two plays (*Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, *Noise*) and two films (*The Last Peasants. Journeys, Adaptation*) – proposing incursions into older and newer, American and European writing which processes intriguing contexts, bears traces of earlier texts, and addresses a contemporary readership.

A cultural anthropological study on the metamorphoses of Romanian identity inside the frontiers of Europe and/or within the European Union, as well as an analysis of the paradoxical fracture and merger identifiable with modernity and postmodernity, are also part of the collection.

The editors would like to thank, once more, the members of the scientific committee, for the time and effort that went into reviewing the articles submitted, and for facilitating the publication of this volume.

Michaela Praisler

Literary Piracy and the Art of Experimental Narratives

Mongia BESBES*

Abstract

A pirate is a ship-raider who abides by no rules. The pirate roams the tides of the ocean exploring new territories. An experimental writer is a literary pirate who explores new textual territories and toys with literary canons. The literary pirate abides by no generic laws and inscribes rebellion in the pages of his fiction. Classicists even label them as "literary outlaws". In normative piracy, stealing, killing, destroying and ravaging are absolutely allowed. In experimental fiction, plots are either spiral, cyclic or non-existent. Characters are either strange humans or mutant creatures mirroring internal and external struggles with their worlds. Ever since the Second World War, American writers have pledged the oath of piracy and created a fiction that transcends reality. To reflect their apparent antagonism to the laws of the canons, literary genres are often introduced by the prefix "anti" such as anti-detective and anti-romance. To delineate their own code of superiority over tradition, the prefix "meta" becomes attached to historiographic-metafiction and "post" is added to post-apocalyptic fiction. Science fiction, graphic novels, psychedelic fiction are only a tip of the iceberg when it comes to enumerating how literary piracy eviscerated the laws of time, space, death, religion, morality and consciousness.

Drawing on Jean François Lyotard's contention that postmodernity is "the incredulity towards grand-narratives", this chapter shall examine how the rise of new literary genres in postmodern literature is a form of literary piracy. American Psycho (1991), One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest (1962) and Naked Lunch (1959) are three case studies that epitomize piracy in its many folds. Accordingly, this article shall explore the different generic transgressions from psychedelic, to anti-detective to postmodern gothic experimentations. It will equally explore how literary piracy transgresses the boundaries of reception through tackling controversial themes ranging from madness, to homosexuality to substance abuse. This essay shall culminate on tracing the parallels between actual piracy and its cultural inscription in these novels. Naturally, as actual piracy is criminalized, literary piracy is deemed as scandalous, inacceptable and highly controversial. Whether sailing across the tides of the endless sea or writing the pages of timeless novels, breaking free from the confinement of mould and tradition renders freedom irresistibly outlawed.

Keywords: *piracy, periphery, outlaw, postmodern, genre*

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Introduction

Postmodern literature and piracy are two practices that are strikingly similar. Literature and piracy defy conventions whether it is genres or social rules. Pirates are iconoclasts by nature since they defy the rules of the land. Postmodern writers challenge the preset canons of deeply-entrenched literary traditions and obliterate the borders of reality and fiction. Pirates steal while writers parody and borrow. Pirates are incriminated to be feared and chanted. Whereas their postmodern counterparts are celebrated to criticized and banned.

Ironically, both parties deviate from the exemplary orthodox upbringing, leaning towards excessive drinking, overt sexual practices and drug consumption. Naturally, their pages reflect these struggles as part of the flawed human experience. Piracy, then, becomes a subtle metaphor for a literature that toys with generic conventions, explores forbidden territories and celebrates an alternative culture.

Three writers are infamous for remodelling fully grounded narratives into a postmodern tale that promotes failure, degeneration, paranoia and despair over a successful recognition of "the All American success story" as it is engraved in "the Great American Novel". William Burroughs, Ken Kesey and Bret Easton Ellis have marked their names in history by writing novels that are as controversial as they are daring.

Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* (1959) was declined by American publishers due to its highly pornographic content, and it has undergone an obscenity trial in Boston in 1966 only to be cleared afterwards. *Naked Lunch* is a hallucinatory anti-detective fiction par excellence. It explores the world of a phantasmagoric reality of agent William Lee, who, appointed by the CIA, travels to Annexia to spy on Dr Benway who turns out to be an agent of Islam Incorporated. Benway supplies him with innovative drugs and reveals his secret designs for a world free of sexual deviance. Chased by two Interzone agents, Lee finds himself tried for state treason. Fortunately, he kills the agents and escapes somewhere unknown.

Within the same world of thrilling paranoia and intrigue, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962) is set in an American asylum managed by a very strict nurse. The asylum impeccable order is disrupted by an Ex-convict, Randle Patrick McMurphy, who undertakes to challenge her authority and restore the humanity of the depersonalized patients. The

narrative is carried out by a highly-medicated schizophrenic Indian American.

The Paranoia turns to a premeditated set of murders committed by a successful Wall Street stock broker: Patrick Bateman, who singlehandedly kills, tortures and rapes his victims in the gothic tale of *American Psycho* (1991).

Ellis, Burroughs and Kesey give prominence to psychopaths and delusional murderers over chivalrous and knightly characters. These latter are contemporary literary pirates dubbed as outlaws and rebels without causes. They are simply celebrations of their own violent nature in search of new moulds of expression.

Piracy or Legitimate Experimentation

Mutiny on Form

Literary innovation has never ceased as literature has become more interdisciplinary, sipping from the nectar of history, philosophy, medicine, politics and chemistry. Literature has transformed into a laboratory accommodating different genres ranging from drama to non-fiction.

Probably, the practice of experimentation best reflects the rebellion against deeply-rooted conceptions of what a good piece of fiction should be like. The norm becomes thwarted in the promised discovery of that "new form". That unknown form has allowed the writer to venture into the realms of the cross-generic and the invention of a "new language" worthy of a new fiction. In this respect, Charles Glicksberg contends:

> The experimental novel marks a drastic departure from the type of realistic fiction to which we have been accustomed and which we tend to regard as the established and inviolable norm. The rebellious experimental novel is often the expression of disillusionment with the novel as a literary form. Contemporary culture not only permits but encourages freedom of experimentation in all arts, in the hope of calling forth creative originality. These experiments in the art of fiction affect both form and style, and a bewildering variety of forms and styles make their appearance (1974: 128).

The experimental novel can be a naturalistic social documentation of history like Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath.* It can take readers to fantastic realms or allegories suck as the *Wild Goose Chase* or penetrate the dream-

like cosmoses while exploring Kafkaesque *Metamorphosis*. This novel can "take the reader places he has never been before" (Kesey 1996: 2), bewilder him beyond belief and lead him to trap doors and enchanted secret forests within the walls of his own city. In the world of the experimental narrative, the unitary wholeness of subjectivity disintegrates as the ego of characters and writers alike multiply.

Perhaps, the chief determiner of this rebellious novel is disintegration. Worlds that are governed by an epistemological unity and an order of logical and causality transform into "a superior reality of the imagination as it fuses past and present and by annihilating time, perceives the only truth that is unattainable by man - the truth projected by timeless memory (Auerbach 2003: 542). Instead of setting genres, experimental fiction is all about setting trends where the laws of taxonomy are completely disregarded.

Different trends have emerged, the lyrical, the surrealist, the new novel and the anti-novel among many others. Their common denominator is that the author is granted freedom "to introduce digressions that are fantastic or grotesque" (Glicksberg 1974: 142). They pertain to the sphere of "new reality" described by Richard Gitman as "[b]eing open-ended, provisional, characterized by suspended judgements, by disbelief in hierarchies, by mistrust of solutions, denouement and competitions, by self-consciousness issuing in tremendous earnestness but also in far ranging mockery" (27).

This radical shift in form clearly announces the cerebral death of the novel, reinstating the spirit of anarchy in adherence to antagonistic discourses that are less likely to be part of the traditional novel. Discourses pertaining to politics, economics, aesthetics, newspaper clips, and illustrations are collages that break the unity of the flow of the narrative.

Alternatively, experimentation becomes synonymous with emergent avant-gardism as to "win new expressive possibilities, for the arts... to bend the existing conventions without breaking them. This is the strenuous and heroic calling of the experimental artist" (Lodge 2002: 170). Hence, writing is piracy in all its forms from sailing across unknown genres to teleporting the reader to unfamiliar territories. Naturally, Burroughs, Ellis and Kesey have defied the conventions of romance, gothic and detective genres, declaring the death of traditional fiction and the birth of the anti-novel.

Naked Lunch: A Spy Tale in a World of Wonders

Pirates often intercept ships, murder the crew and raise their deathly flag. Symmetrically, literary pirates take over traditional forms, bend them, remodel them and produce a mutated genre of their own. This is the case of *Naked Lunch* where William Burroughs parodies the well-established patriotic spy novel. *Naked Lunch* is a hallucinatory narrative whose protagonist happens to be a spy. It is constructed by a series of episodic unrelated chapters that include supernatural elements like giant lizards that are serial assassins or sadistic and lecherous mugwumps. At a first glance, the spy Lee is seen being chased at the train station, then his mission is to infiltrate Benway's laboratory and become his right-hand assistant. He declares, "I am assigned to engage in the services of Doctor Benway for Islam Inc" (Burroughs 1959: 17).

The spy novel has several determiners that "include conflict that is based on a threat or a fear to a country, an agency, or agent. The plot involves "the strategy to end the threat" and usually "involves retrieving or planting information, an object, or a person" (Lee and Bruce 1985). In *Naked Lunch*, there is no conflict or conspiracy against the United States. It is simply a tailing mission that presupposes the observation of Benway's method of operation that consists in "total demoralization. Benway's first act was to abolish concentration camps, mass arrest and, except under certain limited and special circumstances, the use of torture" (Burroughs 1959: 17).

The spy novel is set in exotic lands, foregrounding the elements of mystery. *Naked Lunch* is set in Tangier, Annexia, and the Interzone. However, the Interzone and Annexia seem to be imaginary and contradictory spheres. The Interzone is an ongoing orgy land where everybody engages in murder, rape, and debased sexual practices (1959: 76-80). Annexia is the total opposite where life is a perpetual paperwork preparation. It is a land in which basic rights are denied (17-18).

These lands are not geographically real; they are allegories of supernatural spheres that pertain to another planet rather than exist on earth. As for the spy, he is the furthest from the formulaic hero who holds chivalrous attributes and does everything in his power to preserve the American way of life (Cawelti and Rosenberg 1987: 43). Lee is portrayed killing, sodomizing, raping, and stealing. On occasion, he indulges in drug

consumption and illegal acts (Burroughs 1959: 8). He simply takes part in the different life cycles that exist in the Interzone as well as Annexia. A spy in traditional tales is the epitome of intelligence, resolution and resourcefulness. Lee is rather stripped of his role as he disappears for many chapters, just to resurface at the end in the chase scene.

A loosely knit-plot is the perfect fit for a mock hero. The spy novel that is based on intrigue, sequence and causality transforms into an episodic hallucinatory or rather drug induced narrative laden with anthropological accounts on the history and the types of narcotics.

The tale of Lee does not revolve around allies who are meant to help him in his noble mission. It evolves around mugwumps which are "creatures with no liver", mercenary lizards who feed on mugwump fluids and giant centipedes that crave black human meat (1959: 31). The suspense thriller transforms into a science fiction piece along with aliens, strange creatures and a mad scientist (Benway) leading lives in a giant market place where all commodities are allowed (The Interzone) and a giant prison where the normative act of sitting is liable (Annexia). *Naked Lunch* departs significantly from the idealistic and nationalistic fiction, it is set to tell and depicts a grotesque reality trough the consciousness of an intoxicated homosexual spy. The narrative is intentionally built to disintegrate because its core language is dimmed symptomatic of a latent sickness. Accordingly, Burroughs views that:

> The word is literally a virus, and that it has not been recognized as such because it has achieved a state of relatively stable symbiosis with its human host. But, the word clearly bears the single identifying feature of a virus: it is an organism with no internal function other than replicate itself (1986: 47).

The word is a virus because it emulates, parodies and reproduces, so why not destroy it? Except, the novel in itself perpetuates a self-destructive discourse submerged in death and madness. When the Interzone epitomizes madness, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* indoctrinates it.

The Bull Goose Loony Mad Kingdom

Pirates are often described as rejects. In Medieval times, the Lepers and the insane were sent on a boat called *Stultifera Navis or the ship of fools. This ship would roam the sea till these rejects would die of starvation. The Keseyian ship of*

fools is "no longer a ship but a hospital" (Foucault 1965: 35). *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* is an allegory of McCarthy America in its highest peak of economic boom as it is portrayed by a mental asylum. The major contention rests in the critical consensus that it is a form of a subverted "archetypal romance" (Viktus 1994: 83). Northrop Frye contends that "Romance is the structural core of all fiction: being directly descended from folktale, it brings us closer than any other aspect of literature in the sense of fiction, considered as a whole, as the epic of the creature, man's vision of his own life as a quest" (1976: 15). Folktales are the worlds of enchantment and of mystery as they project the reader into an exotic territory recounting tales of chivalry and sacrifice. The literary romance is the most flexible of genres since it marks the intersection between the highly factual realistic and the extraordinarily fantastic. In this respect, Gillian Beer affirms that:

> The heroic, the pastoral, the exotic, the mysterious, the dream, childhood, and total passionate love. … The romance gives repetitive form to the particular desire of a community, and especially to those desires, which cannot find controlled expression within society. … Romance, being absorbed with the ideal, always has an element of prophecy. It remakes the world in the image of desire (1970: 79).

Cuckoo's Nest is a subversive romance as it thwarts all the previous conceptions of its making. A romance comprises a maiden in distress, a chivalrous hero and a villain with incredible supernatural powers set in an exotic setting. In *Cuckoo's Nest*, the hero is a street hassle proudly bragging to be a psychopath that he has feigned insanity to escape his being sentenced to hard labour. He sarcastically declares "Another thing: I'm in this place because that's the way I planned it, pure and simple, because it's a better place than a work farm. As near as I can tell I'm no loony, or never knew it if I was" (Kesey 1996*:* 57). McMurphy, the presupposed superman of the novel is not only an ex-convict but also a self-proclaimed psychopath. He adds, "What happened, you see, was I got in a couple of hassles at the work farm, to tell the pure truth, and the court ruled that I'm a psychopath" (1996: 11).

The equation is not complete until the hero rescues the damsel in distress. However, in his case, the damsel is a fully-fledged six-foot Indian American. A deeply troubled "vanishing American, a six-foot-eight sweeping machine, scared of its own shadow" (1996: 60) is the perfect

epitome of a troubled maiden awaiting to be rescued from the dragon. The dragon is none other than the robotic nurse Ratchet who is even thought to "freeze the sun" (45). Here the paradigms of the villain and the maiden in distress are completely overthrown. The Indian who has been thought to be the oldest enemy of the American pioneer like Magua, the Indian Huron chief in Fennimore Cooper's classic Romance *The Last of Mohicans,* is completely derided and caricaturized in *Cuckoo's Nest.* The maiden's description fits nurse Ratchet best masking her devilish side as Chief Bromden notices:

> Her face is smooth, calculated, and precision-made, like an expensive baby doll, skin like flesh-colored enamel, blend of white and cream and baby-blue eyes, small nose, and pink little nostrils - everything working together except the color on her lips and fingernails, and the size of her bosom. A mistake was made somehow in manufacturing, putting those big, womanly breasts on what would [have] otherwise been a perfect work, and you can see how bitter she is about it (1996: 6).

Kesey overturns the paradigms of gender casting the role of evil to matriarchy where a female character rejects her own femininity, motherly instinct and docility to become the instrument of the combine, forsaking the role of the victim for that of the executioner.

The enchanted forest, the castle and the mysterious sea are discarded for an asylum-like battle field in which McMurphy fights the demonic power of Nurse Ratchet to restore the humanity of persecuted mental patients through gambling, drugs, sex and pranks. The rigid moral law transforms into an ongoing party where these patients are allowed to indulge in a much needed hedonism while breaking away from Nurse Ratchet's crippling conformity. Ironically, Kesey maintains the tragic element of the romance as the hero sacrifices himself for the common good of the "chronics" and the "acutes". What is left of the mighty "superman" and the "biggest goose loony", as he proudly used to refer to himself, is a senseless statute:

> The ward door opened, and the black boys wheeled in this Gurney with a chart at the bottom that said in heavy black letters, MCMURPHY, RANDLE P. POST-OPERATIVE. And below this was written in ink, LOBOTOMY. They pushed it into the day room and left it standing against the wall, along next to the Vegetables. We stood at the foot of the Gurney,

> reading the chart, then looked up to the other end at the head dented into the pillow, a swirl of red hair over a face (Kesey 1996: 21).

Tragedy may have been preserved, but the fantastic side is maintained in the crazy narrative of chief Bromden for whom everything is a major conspiracy by the combine that seeks to control the universe through robots. The asylum transforms into a zombie colony filled with ongoing monstrosity. Entranced by the blue pill, Chief Bromden describes the rite of the combine ritualistic murders. He declares:

> I'd wander for days in the fog, scared I'd never see another thing, then there'd be that door, opening to show me the mattress padding on the other side to stop out the sounds, the men standing in a line like zombies among shiny copper wires and tubes pulsing light, and the bright scrape of arcing electricity. I'd take my place in the line and wait my turn at the table. The table shaped like a cross, with shadows of a thousand murdered men printed on it, silhouette wrists and ankles running under leather straps sweated green with use, a silhouette neck and head running up to a silver band goes across the forehead. And a technician at the controls beside the table looking up from his dials (1996: 103).

Cuckoo's Nest is an anti-romance that invokes the discourse of madness over that of sanity and proclaims an everlasting war on form where all genres mix in a mad world of total dehumanization. This world is further radicalized in *American Psycho* as the ultimate tale of horror.

American Psycho: A tale of Horror

When horror tales are told, they rhyme with savage and blood-thirsty pirates. Pirates are the perfect epitome of gothic tales as they wreak havoc and terror whenever they set anchor. It is no wonder that gothic fiction is fraught with pirate legends, scary creatures and exotic treasure islands.

The Postmodern gothic has not only preserved the horror and the terror, but it has also explored the beastly side of the human being. Patrick Bateman is the human monster Brit Easton Ellis chooses for his urban tale of horror entitled as *American Psycho*. *American Psycho* is not set in a forsaken castle or an enchanted forest, its plot occurs in upper side Manhattan in a luxurious apartment building where celebrities dwell. Naturally, as the word gothic is architecturally relevant as Gothic architecture was prevalent in Western Europe between the 12th and 16th

centuries (Allué 1999: 31). Its major trademark is its darkness and complexity. It is rather significant that Ellis chooses a high-class apartment as the perfect gothic setting. As if Ellis contended that the city in itself was the locus of "darkness, desire, and power" (Allué 1999: 31).

Naturally, the apartment transforms into the monster that feeds Bateman's urges to kill. Simply because he sits there and watches horror movies "*Body Double* "(Ellis 1991: 112) or "*Texas Chainsaw Massacre*" (1991: 153), "*Bloodungry*" (243), or the "*Toolbox Murders*" (278). These movies catalyze these premeditated murders as he visualizes them in slow motion and then executes them with the utmost pleasure. The being haunted motif is omnipresent in the figure of the gothic hero whom everybody sees as the perfect incarnation of "the American Dream".

The gothic hero is supposed to save the victim and vanquish the monster. In this postmodern gothic tale, the monster is the savior whom everybody mistakes as "the boy next door" (Jancovich 2001: 11). Patrick Bateman is a "rich, handsome, good with the ladies and has a good fashion sense" (Allué 1999: 34). Somehow, Bateman is not complete as his internal vacuum transforms into a compelling desire to kill. He utters, "My life is a living hell …and there are many more people, I, uh want to… want to well I guess murderer" (Ellis 1991: 141). He does not simply stop at wishing; he turns into action as the bold chapter titles of the novel do suggest. The titles themselves emulate real life murders that were announced in the yellow papers as "Confronted by Fagot" (1991: 291) and "Tries to Cook and Eat Girl" (343). He has actually killed the dancer and the homosexual who confessed to him.

The elements of horror and terror can be summarized in sex and murder as they are inspired from pornographic and horror films. In the eighties as monsters, witches, haunted castles and plagued islands cease to make sense, other horrific elements surface. Ellis turns to pornography for the inspiration of "rape, sado-masochistic, killing of women in blue movies" (qtd in Allué 32). Horror exists in society as it is thoroughly documented by tabloids that render homicides, kidnapping and death something taken so lightly.

In one his famous tirades, Price, a junior stock broker and colleague of Bateman, summarizes the frightening content of the daily newspaper saying: "The one issue… in one issue - let's see here…strangled models, babies thrown from tenement rooftops, kids killed in the subway, a

communist rally, Mafia Boss wiped out, Nazis… Baseball players with AIDS, More Mafia Shit, Gridlock, the homeless, various maniacs, fagots" (Ellis 1991: 4). Thus, Ellis draws on Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* assimilating society to a massive orgy of consumption and death. He feeds on the romantic belief that civilization leads to the corruption of the innately-good man and transforms him into a greedy, ambitious and pragmatic beast of the matter. Like Pirates, Ellis is able to twist the conventions of the gothic genre and remodel it within a more plausible framework of horror. Man is his own evil twin.

Say No Evil: Breaching the Taboos

Piracy is about the transgression of norms. The rules of censorship and morality do not apply. Burroughs, Ellis and Kesey have ventured into the territory that remains under the lid of "unspeakable and unacceptable". Relying on the power of allegory the barriers of sexuality, confinement and materialism have been abruptly lifted.

Queer Abomination in American Psycho and Cuckoo's Nest

Naked Lunch, American Psycho and *Cuckoo's Nest* deal with the theme of homosexuality at varying intensity. Especially, the issue of homosexuality has been under scrutiny and faced conservative America's echoing rejection. Queers, fagots and fruits are what Kesey, Ellis and Burroughs use to indicate the heightened tension against homosexuals. In *American Psycho*, Bateman radiates a venomous hatred towards these sexual others to the point of killing them. Whenever he utters the word 'fagot', his resentment is conspicuous. He writes:

> When I stopped on the corner of Sixteenth Street and made a closer inspection it turned out to be something called a "Gay Pride Parade," which made my stomach turn. Homosexuals proudly marched down Fifth Avenue, pink triangles emblazoned on pastel-colored windbreakers, some even holding hands, most singing "Somewhere" out of key and in unison. I stood in front of Paul Smith and watched with a certain traumatized fascination, my mind reeling with the concept that a human being, a *man,* could feel pride over sodomizing another man, but when I began to receive fey catcalls from aging, overmuscled beachboys with walruslike mustaches in between the lines *"There's a place for us, Somewhere a place for us,"* I sprinted over to Sixth Avenue, decided to be late for them (Ellis 1991: 94).

His disdain for homosexuals is further radicalized by the murder of Luis: a homosexual who has declared his undying love for him which he has met with disgust. His homophobia results in a verbal violence fraught with dangerous threats as he angrily hisses: "Listen, you *want* to *die?* I'll do it, Luis. I've done it before and I will fucking *gut* you, *rip* your fucking stomach open" (1991: 198). His threats become reality when he savagely and monstrously strangles him. While describing the scene with the unequal pleasure as the Luis gasps for air, Bateman narrates:

> I start to squeeze, tightening my grip, but it's loose enough to let Luis turn around – still in slow motion – so he can stand facing me, one hand over his wool and silk Polo sweater, the other hand reaching up. His eyelids flutter for an instant, then widen, which is exactly what I want. I want to see Luis's face contort and turn purple and I want him to know who it is who is killing him. I want to be the last face, the last *thing that* Luis sees before he dies (107).

Homophobia becomes an obsession for Bateman who feels it is his mission to eliminate all homosexuals simply because they stir an awful feeling within him: an underlying disgust. He incarnates an ideal that is predominant in America at that time which is inherent with the growing number of hate crimes against homosexuals. By believing in his own superiority over everyone who is different, Bateman portrays the anti-sentiment that contradicts American plurality and tolerance. He epitomizes homophobia as a delectable horror story. This horrific reality is symptomatic of a vacuum in the social fabric. Martin Weinreich observes in this context that "it appears that Patrick Bateman murders to discover authentic, something remotely meaningful beyond the images of surfaces and signs" (2004: 72). This crippling void to which Ellis alludes, Kesey clearly explains.

Dale Harding is portrayed the sanest character in *Cuckoo's Nest*. Nonetheless, he is committed by his wife in the Oregon mental Asylum. During the late fifties, two main groups were persecuted by the United States Government: The Queers and the Communists. In his book *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male,* Alfred Kingsley contends that the spirit of the age has "undermined normative sexuality contributing to the national obsession with homosexuality and placing sexual preferences at the forefront of the public's perception of manhood" (1948: 43). Dale Harding is

also considered as a psychopath although he is a very calm and levelheaded thinker. He is a psychopath simply because he is unable to have a sexual relationship with his wife due to her big breasts that testify nothing but of his impotence regarding her overpowering femininity. His homosexuality has become an object of ridicule in one of the therapeutic group discussions where his problems were not only made public but also subjected him to slander on the behalf of the other ward inmates. He declares when Mack tries to sooth him saying:

> I discovered at an early age that I was—shall we be kind and say different? It's a better, more general word than the other one. I indulged in certain practices that our society regards as shameful. And I got sick. It wasn't the practices, I don't think, it was the feeling that the great, deadly, pointing forefinger of society was pointing at me—and the great voice of millions chanting, 'Shame. Shame. Shame.' It's society's way of dealing with someone different (Kesey 1996: 169).

Harding's sexual orientation subjects him to social rejection not only externally but also internally since he was interpellated by the inner voice saying that what he was doing was inappropriate and that made him sick. In his book, The *History of Sexuality,* Michel Foucault argues that sex entails power structures "put into discourse" and that the body becomes its locus inescapable in the construction of masculinity that is not fixed but rather embedded within the social process becoming a part of history (1978: 11). What is common to both novels, homosexuality is met with complete social rejection. Whether it is violence or madness, queers are regarded as an abomination and a taboo that is better left unrevealed. However even sexuality in its normative way can lead to social madness.

Billy Bibbit: A Victim of Matriarchy

Kesey chooses an asylum as reference to America at the peak of its golden age. Billy Bibbit is an "acute" oedipal patient. Billy is a thirty-two-year-old male with the mind of a six-year old boy who is constantly afraid of his own mother (Kesey 1996: 45). Basically, he has never had any sexual intercourse or fallen in love with a woman. He is constantly afraid of getting punished for misbehaving and is terrorized by Nurse Ratchet because she is the dear friend of his mother. Billy's mother does not support, nurture or appears to love her son. She constantly discourages

him from doing anything because he is still young to achieve anything in life. She says: "Sweetheart, you still have scads of time for things like that. Your whole life is ahead of you" (1996: 269). Chief Bromden observes while observing Mrs. Bibbit kissing her son, "I had to admit she didn't look like a mother of any kind" (Kesey 1996: 269). Billy's troubled latent sexual desire for his mother has resulted in his stuttering and his suicidal tendencies. Simply because he believes what he feels for his mother is wrong and that this feeling of shame destroys his self-esteem and makes him suicidal. He screams "You s-s-saw what she c-can do to us! In the m-m-meeting today" (1996: 45) and threatens that he "should just k-k-kill [him]self" (83). McMurphy, being the redeemer of the asylum, introduces him to a prostitute named Candy in order for him to experiment with his sexuality away from his mother. Consequently, Billy regains confidence and is able to utter words without stuttering. However, Nurse Ratchet rebukes him so harshly that he commits suicide after being temporarily healed.

> "Billy BillyBilly," she said. "Your mother and I are old friends." "No!" he cried. His voice scraped the white, bare walls of the Seclusion Room. He lifted his chin so he was shouting at the moon of light in the ceiling. "N-n-no! […] we watched Billy folding into the floor, head going back, knees coming forward. He rubbed his hand up and down that green pant leg. He was shaking his head in panic like a kid that has been promised a whipping just as soon as a willow is cut (287).

Billy Bibbit is a victim of matriarchy. The stereotype where women are oppressed and victimized angels is thwarted as women become "the mad woman in the attic" and the monster that terrorizes males with its sexuality. Robert Forrey confirms "The premise of the novel is that women ensnare, emasculate, and, in some cases, crucify men" (1975: 224). Billy's mother may have resulted in his suicide but Chief Bromden's Mother has caused his dispossession, schizophrenia and his father's subsequent alcoholism.

Chief Bromden: An Invisible Giant

American democracy has two main skeletons in its closet: Indian American genocides and slavery. The mission to ethnically cleanse Native Americans from the American soil has resulted in the quasi extinction of this human race. The Native American association estimates that the American military

has caused the death of ten million Indian American tribes and only a few thousands are housed in reserves (Bancroft 1886: 25).

Kesey explores this shameful past as he sheds light on the Chinook tribe dispossession. Chief Bromden used to be the proud son of the Dales Chinook tribe before he was ridiculed as the famous Chief Broom (Kesey 1996: 8). The Chief represents a lost generation of a stolen legacy and a buried history. The contrasts between an idyllic past where he has enjoyed "the sound of the falls on the Columbia (…), the woop of Charley Bean Belly stabled himself a big chinook (…), the slap of fish in the water, laughing naked kids on the bank, the woman at the rocks (1996: 73) and a dreadful present within the walls of a stranded asylum has led to his schizophrenia. Chief Broom, as the Black male orderlies like to call him, has a pathological fear of everything that surrounds him, believes that everything around him is a conspiracy and chooses to play the dumb and deaf Indian for the past twenty years of his life (1-10). Chief Broom or "the giant sweeping machine" has witnessed how his mother has summoned government officials and convinced them to build a dam in their own homeland. His mother is a white woman from whom he gets the name Bromden. His father who used to be a feared and a respected chief succumbs to alcoholism due to his shame. Under the influence of his wife, his father Tee Ah Millatoona or the pine that stands tallest signed the contract, forsook his land and doomed his people. Chief Bromden has subsequently internalized this feeling of loss and has started to see reality as distorted. His father shrunk, his mother grew bigger and he "start[ed] getting scared of things" (Kesey 1996: 147).

Naturally in the real world, Chief Bromden is an acculturated invisible. The wounding past impedes the process of self-formation and self-recognition of an independent identity construction, resulting in a lost sense of belonging. In this respect, Martha Sotomayor explains:

> The self-concept can suffer irreparable damage if the socialization process prevents significant and familiar symbols to be present and reinforced at various levels of experience. The sense of belonging is crucial in the development of self-concept, becomes blurred if one's language, cultural patterns, and ethnic experiences are reflected and supported, but rather given a negative connotation in the environment (1980: 13).

Society rejects him as a useless pariah and this does nothing but exacerbate his mental illness further. Pained, he declares:

> I can see all that, and be hurt by it, the way I was hurt by seeing things in the Army, in the war. The way I was hurt by seeing what happened to Papa and the tribe. I thought I'd got over seeing those things and fretting over them. There's no sense in it. There's nothing to be done (106).

Chief Bromden has paradoxically denied his own past and run from his own present. He has become a senseless, anachronistic unity, accepting abuse for the sake of his own survival. As the novel opens, a scared plea echoes from its pages, "they are out there" (7). An interesting register is used to convey the utmost despair of the six-foot Indian engaged in a state of a pathological fear. He "creeps along the wall quiet as dust in [his] canvas shoes" (8). Yet, they know he is there and can detect his 'fear'. He "ducks back in the mop closet, jerk[s] the door shut after [him]and holds [his] breath" (8). He can sense the black boy coming to get him and smell his own fear. He simply conforms to what he is being labeled as "just old Broom Bromden, the half-breed Indian back there hiding behind his mop and can't talk to call for help" (8). Kesey carefully sketches the daily suffering of a dispossessed ethnic minority in its perpetual struggle to have a decent living. His optimistically devises an ending where Chief Bromden escapes from the asylum and embarks towards a new life. Eventually, He lifts the control panel crashing the window and he "[runs] across the grounds in the direction … toward the highway" feeling "like [he] was flying. Free" (178). The Chief is able to fight his own dehumanization, Annexia and Interzone dwellers have metamorphosed into monsters in their quest for the plentiful matter of their existence.

The "Mugwump Consumer" in Naked Lunch

Naked Lunch transposes the reader in allegorical worlds that are equally shocking and estranging. The Interzone is a chaotic realm that exists in the psyche of the hallucinating mind of Lee. The Interzone is an obscene place where everything is sold and allowed. The Interzone is the melting pot of aliens, black market salesmen, slave auctioneers, and war lords. It epitomizes "Consumer Land" where everybody indulges in selling and purchasing as a matter of existence where:

> In the city market is the Meet Café. Followers of obsolete, unthinkable trades doodling in Etruscan, addicts of drugs not yet synthesized, pushers of souped-up hermaline, junk reduced to pure habit offering, precarious vegetable serenity, liquids to induce Latah, tithonian longevity serums, black marketeers of World War III, excisors of telepathic sensitivity, osteopaths of the spirit, investigators of infractions denounced by bland paranoid chess players, servers of fragmentary warrants taken down in hebephrenic shorthand charging unspeakable mutilations of the spirit, investigators of fractions denounced by bland paranoid chess players, servers of fragmentary warrants… sellers of organ tanks and relaxing machines, brokers of exquisite dreams and memories tested on the sensitized cells of junk sickness… maladies of the ocean floor and the stratosphere, maladies of the laboratory and atomic war… A place where the unknown past and the emergent future meet in a vibrating soundless hum… laval entities waiting for a Live One (Burroughs 1959: 56).

Man has become a junky for goods. He has become the ultimate consumer even to the point of purchasing diseases, sadness, and horror that lead nowhere but to his demise. Burroughs attacks the growing materialism that has transformed the world into a dehumanized "body without organs" (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 351). Man has metamorphosed into a "mugwump". Mugwumps are creatures with no livers who nourish themselves exclusively on sweets and incline towards tearing each other "to shreds over clients" (Burroughs 1959: 31). Man has lost his essence since has lost his liver. He has grown addicted to matter "sweets" and blinded by greed to the point of violence and murder. The mugwump consumer is symptomatic of a scatological age in which Man's carnal instinct take hold of his essence, restricting his only purpose in life to procreation, and defection.

Probably, the metaphor of the talking "anus" is best to reflect the hollowness of the contemporary individual whose only words are entirely worthless. Shaffer, the mad colleague of the infamous Dr. Benway concludes that:

> The human body is scandalously inefficient: Instead of a mouth and an anus to get out of order. Why not have one all-purpose hole to eat and eliminate? We could seal up the nose and the mouth, fill the stomach, and make an air hole direct into the lungs where it should have been in the first place (Burroughs 1959: 150).

Schaffer's uncanny statement reflects the degree to which human life has become mechanical. Even though he is able to satisfy all the desires of the flesh, he has become enslaved to his animalistic conformity. His addiction to consumerism destroys any sense of individualism that ceases to exist entirely in Annexia. The word Annex is quite significant since it entails a subsidiary degree to humanity. Burroughs portrays semi-humans in a land of unstoppable paper work. Annexia marks striking similarities with the *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Oceania. Except, when in Oceania, love and freedom of expression are forbidden. In Annexia, life is a long waiting line for preparing an absolutely useless paperwork where:

> Every citizen of Annexia was required to apply for and carry on his person at all times a whole portfolio of documents. Citizens were subject to be stopped in the street at any time; and the Examiner, who might be in plain clothes, in various forms, often in bathing suit or pyjamas, sometimes stark naked except for the badge pinned to his left nipple, after checking each paper, would stamp it. On subsequent inspection the citizen was required to show the properly entered stamps of the last inspection. The Examiner, when he stopped a large group, would only examine and stamp the cards a few. The others were then subject to arrest because their cards were not properly stamped. Arrest meant "provisional detention"; that is, the prisoner would be released if and when his Affidavit of Explanation, properly signed and stamped, was approved by the Assistant Arbiter of Explanations. Since this official hardly came to his office, and the Affidavit of Explanation had to be presented in person, the explainers spent weeks and months waiting around in unheated offices with no chairs and no toilet facilities. (1959: 17)

From being a slave to the flesh in The Interzone, Man is forever prisoner of the endless bureaucratic system. Man is still a consumer of a service and not of a product. In this case, the service consumes the lives of the dwellers of Annexia for whom even daylight is a liability. Again, the metaphor of the dark world of excessive consumption echoes the creature of the mugwump who resides in the dim corners of the ceiling (31). The body without organs is a manifestation of a whole culture that is in desperate need for a new spirit.

Pirate Code: A Culture of Rebellion

Pirates have established their own life style; their own folklore and have their own code. They are a group of subcultural others.

Beatniks: Art Pirates

Post-war American society was marked by a spiritual and an artistic vacuum. The country was torn by war, a recovering frail post-Depression economy and the collapse of theological institutions. In this crippling void, a group of intellectuals decide to nurture this void through an alternative way of life based on embracing life. The Beats have noticed how Americans have equated themselves to ultimate consumers along with the nice picket fence and brand-new cars. Over excessive materialism has distanced Americans from every form of artistic expression. As a result, they have opted for a revolutionary life style based on heavy drinking, drug consumption and free sexual practices (Goodman 1960: 184). The founding fathers of the Beats are Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs. They have met in New York during the 1940s and have bonded over Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*. Allen Ginsberg launched his critically-acclaimed poetic collection named *The Howl* (1956) where he analogizes Americans to "grateful dead" who are deep to their ears in consumption. Kerouac writes on *The Road* (1957) to chronicle his adventure with Neal Cassidy. Using Sal Paradise as a mouth piece, Kerouac tells his unusual journey where he embarks on an adventure with only fifty dollars in his pocket, hitchhiking from New York to Denver. Sal Paradise, the aspiring middle class writer, leaves the comfort of his home and becomes a hobo while seeking an honest man's work. Paradise breaks with his WASP culture and chooses to identify with subaltern groups (Theado 2000: 15-6). Burroughs did the same both in writing and in the flesh. Born the son of a wealthy family, Burroughs leaves home, drops out of Harvard and travels the world on a two-hundred-dollar allowance (Boon 2002: 164). Burroughs has even spent four years in the Peruvian jungle researching for the yagé plant for its telepathic power.

Burroughs, Kerouac, Kenneth, and Ginsberg were all the enemies of complacency and consumerism, devising different metaphors to condemn it. When Kerouac calls it "the serpent" that eats the earth (1991: 148). Ginsberg describes humanity as "a locust like blight on the plane… living

in a kind of addict's dream of affluence comfort, eternal progress" (Snyder 1965: 39). This indictment results in the formation of new bohemian counterculture based on the disengagement from the materialistic society, the reliance on hiring to Far East literature and Buddha consciousness. They have founded the San Francisco West-Coast Bohemian anarchist modernist tradition and the New York Impulse (Johnston 2005: 109). In literature, Kerouac introduces the "spontaneous writing" that echoes the pace of human thinking and its freedom from the norms of punctuation where "the sketching language is undisturbed flow from the mind of personal secret idea-words, blowing as (per jazz musician) on subject of image" (Boon 2002: 198). Burroughs is famous for the "cut-up" to break free from the mould. Burroughs obliterates the conventions between non-fiction and fiction to further rebel against the conformity of the age. In this respect, Lydenberg notes "the cut-up defy copy right and ownership, transgressing the regulations of boundary and conventions" (1987: 49). Like Pirates they raid ships cargos and reappropriate them as their own. These Beats have not made a significant political difference, but they have affected generations to come like the hippies, punk culture and Generation X (Skerl and Lyndenberg 1991: 63). They have perhaps changed the whole face of American literature and history.

The Merry Pranksters: Defying the System

Pirates are known for their experimentation with opiates while crossing the Far East. The Merry Pranksters were no different except they resorted to a customized version of hallucinogenic named as LSD. LSD is the acronym for Lysergic acid diethylamide. It is substance that was first mistaken as uterotonic by the Swiss gynaecologist Albert Huaffman. While drinking the substance, he has had an induced hallucination where he has seen "an interrupted stream of fantastic images of extraordinary plasticity and vividness accompanied by an intense kaleidoscopic play of colors" *(*Lee and Shlain 1985: 14-15*)*. LSD was then adopted by the CIA as a trial drug for interrogation and Mind control under the name MK ULTRA and BLUEBIRD (1985: 45). Kesey has participated in the psychedelic testing in Menlo Park Veteran Hospital in 1959. His involvement lasted two months ingesting from eight to ten types of drugs such as mescaline, psilocybin and more obscure pharmaceuticals such as IT-290 and Mp-14 (Dodgson 2006: 189). To him, these substances are 'mind blowing'. When asked about their

effects, he answered "[another] world happened… it slowly becomes evident to you that there's some awful and unique logic going on just as real as, in some ways as your other world" (qtd in Kesey 16). Under the influence of this substance, Kesey was able to deliver his masterpiece *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* and earn a good living allowing him to purchase The Perry Lane house. In this place that the famous Merry Pranksters saw the light.

> His house on Perry Lane, the bohemian hangout area for Stanford students, became a gravitational force attracting every kind of artist and intellectual. Among them were Larry McMurtry, the young writers Ed McClanahan and Bob Stone, the dancer Chloe Scott, Roy Seburn, Carl Lehamann-Haupt, and Richard Alpert (De Crescenzo 2011: 7).

The Merry Pranksters have attempted to rebel against the predominately lethargic consciousness and explore a newly-induced one. Their experimentation with Acid has been an ironic defiance to the CIA mind control project. They would consume the substance and produce artistic work that counteracts the system. The Merry Pranksters purchased a Harvard international old bus and departed on a cross-country journey just like Sal Paradise in Kerouac's *On the Road.* Unlike the Beats, who experimented with literature, they decided to make art through living it. Their major difference lies in the fact that:

> The Beats and the Pranksters were both countercultural movements. The Beats were trying to change literature and their representation of themselves; the Pranksters were trying to change the masses. The latter brought LSD to public awareness and spoke of its "mind expanding, life-enhancing properties," birthing the psychedelic revolution and the hippie movement (De Crescenzo 2011: 9).

The Merry Pranksters ideals have inspired the Hippies and the Anti-War militants to change the face of American history and devise a new road map for a freer, more pluralistic and more flexible America. They have advocated "the same rejection of suburban culture, the same disdain for authority and the same enthusiasm for self-expression. There were still also notable moments of friction, particularly on how to achieve the goals of personal liberation and transformation of society" (Lee and Shlain 1985: 146). The Merry Pranksters have parted paths once LSD was criminalized.

Kesey was sentenced to six months and the trial ended after it has sparked a cataclysmic shift in US history (De Crescenzo 2011: 13). Ironically what the fifties and sixties intellectuals have fought so fiercely against has become the way of life Yuppies adopted during the 1980s.

The Yuppies: Empty Shells of Human Beings

Ellis marks his indictment of a Yuppie culture based on excessive materialism and fake ideals of vice and fake luxury. The word Yuppies is an acronym for Urban Young Professionals. Yuppies equate success with material possession believing that individualism is the most important attribute one can possess to achieve success. The hypocritical nature of the Yuppies is reflected in the homicidal maniac *Patrick Bateman*. Patrick Bateman is "the symbol of success in the eighties". He is the ultimate boy next door who is adored, envied and loved by everybody else. Patrick Bateman's main quest is to secure a reservation in the best and most expensive restaurant in town. He only wears top quality products and dwells in the best neighbourhood in New York. He works for Wall Street: the locus of capitalism in the America. Bateman embodies the dark side of capitalism by having a double personality: a nice gentleman at day and a psychotic murderer at night. Ellis satirizes the emptiness act of acquiring goods, doping and having excessive sex. Everything becomes commodified to the point that the human life becomes as dispensable as an out of the season clothing. This hollowness is symptomatic of a lost identity where humans become semi-human. Echoing deepening frustration, Patrick Bateman declares:

> These are no more barriers to cross. All I have in common with the uncontrollable and the insane, the vicious and the evil, all I have caused and my utter indifference towards it, I have now surpassed. My pain is constant and sharp and I do not hope for a better world for anyone. In fact, I want my pain to be inflicted on others (Ellis 1991: 87).

This sadistic nature translates in the alienation of others and the infliction of their suffering to fill a lost void within them. As such, those who can be categorized as others deeply unsettle him and awaken his urges to kill them. The word "other" entails having a different identity. Whether it is immigrant, woman, homosexual or homeless, they are part of a group. Bateman is part of none since he values individualism. So, in order for him

to justify his existence, he has to get rid of the rest. In reality, the yuppies struggle to portray a civilized beckoning community because they suffer from a spiritual and artistic vacuum that cannot be filled with money. Instead, they try to exist in a hyperreality and become holograms. Being their representative, Bateman videotapes talk shows, and spends half of his evenings alone watching rented pornography and horror movies. He only makes sense in the virtual world because in reality he nothing but another commodity. It is simply "humanist monstrosity" that exists in the state of non-existence (Cojocaru 2008: 196). *American Psycho* is then a tale of monstrosity par excellence, but the monster is not an alien or a super villain. The real monster is the materialistic system that feeds on the souls of these yuppies and deeply dehumanizes them. They become selfish and harrowing creatures with nothing but the demise and torture of others. The Yuppies can be analogized to blood thirsty pirates who enjoy killing for killing's sake. Ironically, violence, xenophobia and murder become the pillars of a decadent society.

Conclusion

Pirates and postmodern writers are quite similar for being iconoclasts. Pirates want to explore new routes and conquer the ocean. Postmodern writers enjoy breaching the rigid laws of the genre. Pirates raid ships and steal the gold. Postmodern writers borrow, parody, revisit and cut-up preexisting texts and reinvent a new fiction. Pirates have no codes, norms or ethics to preserve. They are free rowdy individuals. Postmodern writers venture into the realms that deeply shock their audience, discarding any notion of censorship or taboo. Themes that range from sexuality to politics to substance abuse to incest and rape are evenly addressed without any filter. Pirates are cultural rebels who self marginalized themselves from the rigid spheres of social damnation and established a lore of their own. Postmodern writers have rebelled against mainstream lethargy, conformity and materialism and called for a pluralistic discourse that promotes equality and authenticity. Ellis's tale of horror, Kesey's hallucinogenic narrative, and Burroughs' eccentric novel has all transgressed the norms of the Great American Novel. Whether it is adapting the classic gothic to the postmodern age, epitomizing the sickness of the American society or taking the reader to realms of depravity and bureaucracy, Ellis, Kesey and

Burroughs have legitimized literary piracy. To them, Piracy is equated with the transformation of the classic and the generic into the fantastic, the supernatural and the gothic. They fiercely attack an obsolete system that stifles creativity and hollows human existence, advocating for a richer, deeper and a more dynamic existence. In this maze of innovation and reproduction, the reader becomes riddled with emergent new forms, daring content and a riveting call for freedom.

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Inside *Noise*: A Case of Intersemiotic Translation and Metatheatre in Radio Drama

Lukasz BOROWIEC [*]

Abstract

Although a number of discussions, analyses and interpretations of radio drama attempt to make effective use of semiotics, semiotic vocabulary tends to be employed mainly for the purposes of theoretical explications on the relationship between radio productions and their listeners. This seems to be an obvious direction, as intersemiotic translation is an inherent part of radio drama which is essentially based on the written script interpreted via the sound medium. In other words, radio drama may be said to exist thanks to intersemiotic translation between the written word and its acoustic realization. Taking the above as the starting point, this paper aims to show how intersemiotic translation works within *a produced radio play. I want to focus specifically on one BBC radio production entitled* Noise *(2012) and on its basis present the ways in which various semiotic systems (in spite of the apparent limitations of radio drama as a purely sound medium) interact on various levels. This reveals intersemiotic translation within radio plays as conducive to emphasizing its dramatic form, which further results in uncovering radio drama's metatheatrical elements.*

Keywords: *radio drama; intersemiotic translation; metatheatre; Noise*

It is fascinating to observe different ways in which, until the end of the 20th century, radio drama enthusiasts and researchers constantly had to reassert the need for their studies. In 1981, John Drakakis began the introduction to his seminal work *British Radio Drama* by stating that radio plays are characterized by "sporadic" and "incomplete" history (1). Next, in 1999, so almost 20 years later, another important radio drama researcher Tim Crook echoed Drakakis' observation when in the acknowledgements section of his *Radio Drama: Theory and Practice* he called radio plays "the most understated creative, dramatic and literary art [form]" (ix).

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By contrast, especially the second decade of the 21st century has brought a far more increased awareness and proliferation of radio drama research. Two selected book-length contributions in this field, Jeff Porter's *Lost Sound: The Forgotten Art of Radio Storytelling* and *Audionarratology: Interfaces of Sound and Narrative* edited by Jarmila Mildorf and Till Kinzel (both from 2016), provide an insight into the scope of scholarly interest in radio drama. The former focuses mainly on the American radio in the 1930s and 1940s, attempting to "answer how literary sensibilities [...] radicalized a broadcast medium and were in turn energized by it" (Porter 2016). The latter is a collection of essays on "interfaces of sound and narrative" in the vein of "postclassical narratology" and the term 'audionarratology' refers to "forms and functions of sound and their relation to narrative structure" (Mildorf and Kinzel 2016).

Additionally, the present possibility to listen to radio online means relieving the listeners from the time constraints of traditional broadcasts. Here, the BBC iPlayer – with virtually all radio content available up to 30 days after broadcast – stands out as a prominent example. As Lawrence Raw rightly observes, thanks to the Internet listeners are able to control their listening experience "rather than [be] at the scheduling and archiving whims of individual radio stations and/or their controllers" (2013: 37-8), a further consequence of it being a greater internationalization of radio drama content.

The fact that modern technology provides an opportunity for multiple individual re-broadcasts of chosen radio plays can undoubtedly facilitate closer studies of radio drama. What is more, this reflects the long-awaited need to see radio plays as more than one-off events, which has been succinctly expressed by the leading post-war radio drama researcher Donald McWhinnie in 1959:

> I do believe that any artistic experience worth having can only be enriched by a second acquaintance, and the more profound the content the more closely you need to study it, as you come back again and again to a painting or a piece of music to discover new perspectives, new shades of meaning (McWhinnie 1959: 43 cited in Hand and Traynor 2011: 60).

The above quotation brings us to the methods of studying radio drama. These have varied a lot from the very inception of radio dramatic forms. Although "by 1930 a basic grammar of radio production had been

formulated," the vocabulary of radio drama research has been borrowed from such diverse disciplines as film, literature, theatre or psychology (Drakakis 1981: 7). This interdisciplinarity of theoretical approaches to radio drama has been developing until the present times (to include for instance adaptation studies and, most recently, narratology). What is more, theories established at the very beginning of radio studies are constantly reformulated in order to yield new insights. Good examples of such practices may be the incorporation of Lance Sieveking's thought by Tim Crook (1999: 70-89) or, in the field of Polish studies on radio drama, the return to phenomenological and aesthetic theories of Leopold Blaustein from the inter-war period (Łastowiecki 2013).

When analysing essential features of radio drama, *Dermot Rattigan in his* Theatre of Sound: Radio and the Dramatic Imagination (2002) provides a neat diagram of its constituent parts and it is quite obvious that the underlying theoretical assumptions are based here on semiotics (222). The two opposing poles of the diagram present the dramatic text and the performance text, which instantly brings to mind such semiotic discussions of drama/theatre relationships as the classical approach of Anne Ubersfeld elaborated in her *Reading Theatre* (1999). The numerous elements located between both 'texts' imply that the script for radio drama has to undergo a process of translation into signs of a different nature in order to become a fully realized radio production.[1] This kind of translation, therefore, can safely be called intersemiotic, as it mediates between two different semiotic systems: that of the written text and of its audio realization.[2] This application, albeit indirect in Rattigan's case, of semiotic terminology is nothing surprising and even taken for granted among radio drama researchers (see, for instance, Crisell (1986), White (2005), or Bachura (2012) in Poland). However, it is interesting that the concept of intersemiotic translation is mainly, if not exclusively, used to study how meanings are produced by various elements of radio drama on their way from the script to the listener's ear (as in Rattigan 2002). What could further these analyses is attempting to find out how the concept of intersemiotic translation could be used for the discussion of the worlds created by radio drama, that is within the imaginary realms created by radio productions.

Taking the above as the starting point, in this paper I would like to demonstrate how intersemiotic translation can be seen as operating inside a radio play. I want to focus specifically on one relatively recent BBC radio

production entitled *Noise* (2012) by Alex Bulmer and on its basis present the ways in which various semiotic systems (in spite of the apparent limitations of radio drama as a purely sound medium) interact on various levels. The analysis reveals intersemiotic translation within radio drama as conducive to emphasizing its dramatic form, which further results in uncovering radio drama's metatheatrical aspects.

Noise tells the story of a young woman called Kit, an orphan of Polish origin, who is suffering from a memory loss. Her amnesia is the result of a serious case of hypothermia whose causes are unknown at the beginning of the story. After some time spent in a special clinic, where she takes part in sessions with the psychologist Helena, Kit goes back home and is taken care of by her partner Dan, a freelance music editor and an ex-lecturer. As the story develops, the listener learns that shortly before Kit's accident her relationship with Dan was on the verge of falling apart. Now Dan tries to take advantage of Kit's memory loss in order to replace her original memories with the ones he creates in his own studio by remixing the recordings from their past. He is almost successful when Kit's two encounters – first with Helena, and next with Dan's colleague Matt – spark off a chain of associations in her head that lead to her final realization that she has been cheated and that Dan is responsible for her suffering.

The play begins with a mixture of inexplicable voices, sounds and a piano tune. Together, they create the title 'noise' which the listeners are going to decipher in the course of the play. Out of the noise, the sound of an encephalograph comes to the fore, which signifies the space of the hospital in which we first meet Kit. The first words of the play are spoken by Dan. His exclamation "She blinked!"[3] marks Kit's transition from the unconscious state in which only sounds dominate to the visual reality with language as its defining feature (the listeners would not know what happens to Kit if it were not for Dan's words). Thus, the transition may be said to take place between the aural and visual/verbal semiotic systems, although Kit's core memories still remain in the audio sphere. Additionally, the beginning of the play swiftly foregrounds Kit as the main character by giving the listeners access to the 'noise' in her mind out of which they accompany her while she enters the visual world.

The next step for Kit is to get accustomed to reality again after the shock of hypothermia, which means learning the basics of everyday life anew. She is first assisted by Helena, who from the very beginning takes

total control over Kit's convalescence by isolating Kit from Dan and arranging regular sessions with the girl. During these meetings Helena turns out to be a very matter-of-fact professional who tries to awaken self-confidence in Kit and build in her mind a consistent picture of reality.

It is interesting to observe how much emphasis Helena puts on language. Even before the beginning of the therapy, Helena hears Kit slowly uttering the sequence of letters "ABD," which she instantly corrects to "ABC" in accordance with the alphabetical system. It is only later revealed that Kit at that moment is naming the notes of the melody (so, in other words, a sequence of sounds) she is recalling. However, Helena's concentration on the linguistic aspect of reality is too strong to consider the sequence from a wider perspective. This linguistic focus is further proved by Helena's request that Kit should keep a journal in which she should record all events of a given day so that she can later reread them and gradually construct a reliable reality around her.

On the one hand, the journal is supposed to facilitate the recovery of memory which may be frequently overburdened with the unstoppable flow of new information. As Andrews and Maksimova sum up Lotman's observation, "written text and the process of writing shift the burden of memory from an individual to an external symbolic system" (2008: 264). At the same time, however, language in this case acts like a "memory condenser" (Lotman 1990: 110). Thus, the written observations present the subjective perception which cannot be verified again by any objective means, as going back in time is impossible. Therefore, at the very beginning of her recovery Kit is subjected to the process of reality transformation, albeit for a good purpose.

Helena further underlines the importance of keeping a journal by claiming that "[w]e need history." For her, the process of one's conscious act of writing can at least give an impression of maintaining control over one's life, as she advises Kit: "Take control of the things you can control." In this way, she asks Kit to "translate [herself] through […] history" (Kloepfer and Shaw 1981: 33)[4], which also implies an intersemiotic translation of her memories based on sound into the linguistic order that in Helena's view governs the visible reality.

In their discussion on intersemiotic transposition, based on examples taken from poems accompanied by visual elements, Claus Clüver and Burton Watson observe:

> [T]he interpenetration of visual and verbal signs is such that the meaning constructed from the text as a whole will be quite different from the meanings derived from the signs alone; not infrequently, the signs of one system by themselves do not permit the production of any coherent meaning at all (1989: 57).

This is exactly what Kit seems to be afraid of when she finally returns home and begins her struggle for independent life. As if to 'double check' the reality of her new space, she keeps repeating the words which refer to objects or actions she is performing at a given moment (for example, while pouring hot water into a cup and brewing tea). The naming process she undertakes can seem to be an illustration of gluing together Saussurean signifieds and signifiers. In a comic exchange with Dan, Kit even questions the nature of the object called 'coffee table' as they never put coffee on it. Thus, she underlines the arbitrariness of names given to objects in a language which she is forced to hold on to in order to regain her former self.

Dan's involvement in Kit's convalescence employs a different means. The man attempts to help Kit in her recovery by asking her to listen to selected recordings from the past that they both shared. Dan's strategy is based on his intimate knowledge of Kit. She does not realize it yet, but he is fully aware of Kit's previous fascination with music and, by extension, the reality of sound. That is why he chooses to appeal to her emotions through recorded voices which he has intentionally edited in advance. What is more, in his conversations with Kit – which he also records – he purposefully steers each dialogue in the direction which would equip him with more material for further editing. For instance, shortly after they arrive from the hospital, Dan encourages Kit to repeat the word 'home' with reference to the space of his flat in order to use her voice later as part of the recording which is to prove her former attachment to the life they spent together.

Thus, the word 'home' becomes a metonymy of security and lost happiness for Kit. The significance of this metonymy – which, apart from the metaphor, constitutes a "fundamental [mechanism] of meaning construction" (Osimo 2008: 329) in artistic works – is intentionally narrowed by Dan in order to limit the range of possible interpretations that Kit might come up with while listening to the recordings. What is more, Osimo proposes to see single words as well as texts like metaphorical "mugs":

> One mug (special nuance of a word) is the one that interests us in the given chronotopic context, but the other ones are inseparable, and go around with it. When we stop at a table to deliver our tray (word), we put down our tray having in mind one particular mug (acceptation), but our receivers, sitting at the table, since we (inevitably) give them a lot of mugs with different drinks (acceptations), may decide that they prefer to interpret our word as composed of some other drink, and we, senders, don't always realize that (2008: 328-9).

Kit is actually unable to see beyond a much broader scope of possible interpretations due to Dan's interference with the recordings. The fact that Dan wants to be the sole controller of audio reality for Kit is further highlighted by his admonition that she is never to enter his studio, where he gives acoustic shape to his intrigue.

The "meaning-changing mechanism" (Osimo 2008: 330) that in Dan's case are the edited recordings may also influence the listeners' perception of the main protagonist's name. In this way, even the seemingly stable proper name becomes a fluid concept (Osimo 2008: 330-1). Under Dan's control, Kit becomes a metaphorical "tool kit" which Dan makes use of to realize his plan of keeping his partner forever subordinate to him. The listeners are being reminded of the man's obsession with control every time Dan is alone working on his recordings – at these moments piano music, the same as the one in Kit's head in the opening of the play, is audible in the background.

Therefore, it seems justifiable to claim that two semiotic systems are in conflict inside Kit. Inspired by Helena, Kit strives to establish some contact with reality through the spoken and written languages that are to remain in constant collaboration. On the other hand, her yet unrealized fascination with sound is abused by Dan, who provides her with fabricated facts. These two conflicting semiotic systems fight within Kit's mind and as the play progresses it transpires that the constant undermining of Helena's therapeutic measures by Dan's deception leaves Kit alone in her struggle for recovery.

The turning point for Kit comes with the unexpected visit of Dan's colleague Matt, who became her confidant shortly before Kit's accident. To him she confessed the problems she had with Dan's obsessive love for her. The meeting ends quite abruptly because Dan earlier falsely informs Kit that she was sexually abused by Matt. Having been isolated from all other

people apart from Helena and Dan, Kit resorts to the only information she possesses and asks Matt to leave.

However, the visit is long enough to awaken Kit's suspicions. This takes place in an exchange which interweaves numerous strands of the semiotic systems presented in the play. As a music teacher who previously taught Kit to play the piano, Matt expresses his surprise at the fact that the piano in Dan and Kit's flat serves only as a support for flowers. For Kit, this function of the object, which has been devised and imposed by Dan, is unquestionable. In Kit's linguistic system a 'piano' – with its arbitrarily assigned name – may only be a piece of decorative furniture, which reflects her previous experience with the inexplicable nature of the name for the coffee table. However, when Matt keeps insisting that the piano is actually Kit's property, brought to the flat of her own initiative, the two semiotic systems which Kit has so far tried to reconcile begin to be in conflict.

The linguistic system proposed by Helena seems to have failed, as the process of naming and assigning functions to objects is questioned by Matt as an outside observer. Inevitably, Dan becomes the first suspect as it is him that prepared the flat before Kit's arrival from the hospital. In addition, Dan stands for the semiotic system of sound which provides Kit with her memories and is intended to help her construct an integrated personality. What is even more important, the object which triggers the conflict of semiotic systems may also be said to embody both of them. At first, the piano for Kit is a linguistic construct with a function unconnected with any production of sound. After Matt's visit the piano reveals its potential for producing sounds which Kit can control – it was her who learnt to play it, the learnt piece was by Chopin and in fact it is his music that the listeners can hear at the beginning of the play as well as later in various moments of the story.

Thus, Kit undergoes a transformation. At first she is an active interpreter/creator of the linguistic semiotic system and a mere recipient of the audio semiotic system. With the realization that she could and perhaps still can control sounds, Kit expands her area of independence and realizes that her freedom in interpreting reality can go beyond just one semiotic system.

The climax of the play results precisely from this realization. While preparing a special dinner to celebrate Kit's progress, the girl picks up on Dan's accidental remark about one of their trips and asks him to play one

of the recordings again. It is important to notice that at this point it is her who for the first time consciously selects audio input. After listening to the recording she quickly compares it with her written records in the journal and finds out a serious discrepancy between two versions of the same story. This pushes her to instinctively accuse Dan of deceiving her. Paradoxically, the inconsistency between the two semiotic systems brings about her consistency of mind. This is how she becomes the organising agent in constructing her own independent perspective on the world.

The play ends with a mix of sounds, voices and noises that are almost identical with the opening sequence. Now, however, all elements are clear and understandable. Once more the listeners enter Kit's mind to find out that perhaps the form of her memories has not changed, but the content is finally decipherable. The last exchange between the characters belongs to Dan and Kit. After the man observes that the weather outside is so cold that it is hard to imagine anyone being able to endure such low temperatures, Kit answers briefly: "I can." Her words are doubly meaningful. Firstly, they refer to her regained physical endurance and secondly, to her mental abilities which she is now learning to control even more fully.

As it can be observed, intersemiotic translation in *Noise* works on numerous levels. With regard to therapeutic methods applied to Kit, Helena attempts to translate her sensations, feelings and observations into the semiotic system of language. Dan not only translates Kit's unrevealed memories into sound, but first of all by fabricating them supplies the versions which conform to his devious plan. In each case, Kit is the final recipient of the intersemiotic translation process.

It is interesting to note that during the scene when Kit compares the two versions of her memories – one in sound and the other in the written form – it is the latter that turns out to find its confirmation in Matt's words. Therefore, the suggestion is that the written record – which might be called a translation of a conceptual structure into its corresponding linguistic form (Osimo 2002: 618-9) – is supposed to be credited with more reliability. At this point one is reminded of the above-mentioned diagram by Dermot Rattigan, in which the written text is at the source of the aural realization of a radio play. Therefore, the hierarchy suggested inside the play Noise is also applicable to the process of creating radio drama, which almost always possesses the written text as its indispensable basis. Such a connection

provokes a discussion on metatheatrical elements which can be observed in the analyzed play.

In the words of Lionel Abel, metatheatrical plays

> have a common character: all of them are theatre pieces about life seen as already theatricalized. By this I mean that the persons appearing on the stage in these plays are there not simply because they were caught by the playwright in dramatic postures as a camera might catch them, but because they themselves knew they were dramatic before the playwright took note of them. [...] Now, from a certain point of view, only that life which has acknowledged its inherent theatricality can be made interesting on the stage. From the same modern view, events, when interesting, will have the quality of having been thought, rather than of having simply occurred (2003: 135).

These remarks are only partly applicable to *Noise*. This is because, on the one hand, the listeners throughout the play are encouraged to accept that they are participating in the events that have "simply occurred." Kit has to struggle with her memory loss and at no time does she signal that as a person "appearing on the [radio] stage" she knows she is "dramatic before the playwright took note of [her]."

On the other hand, a closer look at *Noise* reveals that this radio drama is in fact about various aspects of creation: Dan in his recordings creates memories for Kit; Helena creates a way of approaching reality in order to help Kit regain her former self; finally, Kit struggles to create her own world out of the contradictory elements she is supplied with.

Among metatheatrical elements enumerated by Patrice Pavis – which include a play within a play, addressing the audience or making theatre the subject of dialogue (2002: 287-9) – he also suggests that metatheatre is present everywhere the depicted reality resembles theatre. This is especially true for *Noise*. Dan is involved in the process of editing the recordings, which is precisely what takes place during the post-production of radio plays. Therefore, the listeners experience post-production on a double level. They receive the effects of post-production of the play called *Noise* (produced for the BBC by Polly Thomas) as a play about a man trying to 'post-produce' a young woman's memories. In this way, everything that takes place once Kit moves to stay in Dan's flat resembles a carefully planned performance based primarily on words and sounds, so in fact the essence of radio drama.

What is more, the fact that the play begins with the noise inside Kit's head gains here additional significance. By putting emphasis on the need for the disentanglement of the various sounds in Kit's memory, the listeners are persuaded to think of the radio play *Noise* as a selection of Kit's memories which are remixed by Dan, transcribed with Helena's help and targeted at Kit as their ultimate recipient *within* the world of radio drama.

When one steps beyond this world and becomes conscious of his role as a listener, the fact to be considered is the moment when Kit finds her independent way to regain memory through combining contradictory verbal and sound inputs she has received. Just like Kit's understanding arises out of the discovery of interrelationships and contradictions which she is left alone to decipher, the task of the listeners – also alone in their experience of listening to radio drama – seems to hinge on being watchful of gaps that have to be filled in. These gaps appeal to to the organising power of the listeners' imagination whose aim is to discover the "translation system" peculiar to a given radio play and then to learn its "system of teaching it" (Kloepfer and Shaw 34) to the listeners.

Notes

1. Rattigan calls the two processes "literary inception" and "aural realization" (222).
2. The term "intersemiotic translation" is used here after Jakobson, who in his essay "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation" defines intersemiotic translation as an interpretation of verbal signs into non-verbal ones (1959: 260-1). By extension, intersemiotic translation can be understood more broadly as an interpretation of one semiotic system by another.
3. All quotations have been transcribed directly from the play.
4. Although Kloepfer and Shaw use the quoted statement in reference to prose works and the characters' relation to historical change, it seems also perfectly applicable to the context of the discussed play.

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Private Stories, Public Issues: Representations of Migration in Angus Macqueen's *The Last Peasants. Journeys*

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Abstract

The documentary trilogy The Last Peasants (2003), directed and produced by Angus Macqueen, seeks to reveal the 'private stories' behind Romanians' illegal migration to Western Europe against the background of major transformations in the post-Communist Romanian society still in transition at the turn of the twenty-first century. The paper focuses on one of the films of the trilogy, Journeys, which is the most explicit in its representation of the dangers that Romanian migrants had to face, prior to Romania's joining the European Union, while crossing borders to 'go West' in hope of living their 'Western European dream'. The exploration of the rhetorical and narrative strategies employed by the British director in this filmic text aims, therefore, at casting light on how images of the sending Romanian society, the Western European hosts and the Romanian diaspora are constructed, in an attempt to challenge the audiences and to raise their awareness of the need for a better understanding of such a complex social phenomenon as migration, as well as for the change in attitudes in host-migrant interactions.

Key words: *documentary, illegal migration, Home/West, identity, imagology.*

Introduction

In 2004, the Astra Film Festival organised in Sibiu granted a "Special Jury Prize" to Angus Macqueen's documentary trilogy *The Last Peasants* (*Temptation; Journeys; A Good Wife*). Another special prize, this time granted by the *Formula AS* Romanian magazine (Longin Popescu 2004), followed. That confirmed that the British director's filmic representations of life in the village of Budeşti, Maramureş, subject to major transformations in the years coming after the 1989 Revolution, and in the Romanian diaspora, whose ranks had grown considerably in the 1990s owing to the 'irresistible lure' of the West, appealed to the Romanian audiences by their addressing a

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poignant aspect of social life in post-Communist Romania, as well as by their blending of rhetorical and aesthetic strategies meant to "make the stuff of social reality visible and audible in a distinctive way" (Nichols 2001: 1).

Released in early 2003 on Channel 4 in an attempt to show something different that would make especially "young people" stop "zap[ping] between six different channels at once because everything looks roughly the same" (Macqueen qtd. in Adams 2003) and to draw their attention to "a vision that looks a lot like [Britain's] past, but which tells (...) a great deal about our present" (Adams 2003), Macqueen's documentary series had also been well received at least in the specialised circles in Europe, being granted, in 2003 and early 2004, various prizes[1]. Its impact at the level of the public at large in the UK, Romania and elsewhere in Europe at the beginning of the new millennium is, however, relatively difficult to assess.

Yet it is clear that, despite its having come out fifteen years ago, Macqueen's documentary trilogy has not lost its topicality, as migration has remained one of the most sensitive social problems for many of the European countries, be they destinations or still sources (like Romania) of migrant flows. The present exploration of *Journeys*, one of the three films of *The Last Peasants*, aims, therefore, to demonstrate that, even if migration trends and migration-related historical circumstances, attitudes, policies, legal and institutional practices have changed in the new context of reception of Macqueen's production, it still successfully promotes a valid lesson for the present-day audiences.

In order to fully understand such a complex social phenomenon as migration and to overcome national prejudice and the tendency to negatively stereotyping the migrant other, the viewers, particularly those belonging to the receiving societies, must be encouraged to develop their analytical impulse, to discover the private stories behind major public issues, so that they could ultimately become active participants in the process of migration-related public policy-making and in the migrant-host cross-cultural encounters. And as "the usual means of doing this is by recourse to techniques of rhetoric", which "may readily make use of poetic, narrative, or logical elements" (Nichols 2001: 16) lending expressivity to the filmic text (Renov 1993: 30), due attention is here paid to how the British "spectant" constructs the images of the "spected" Romanian other (Leerssen 2007: 27 and 2017: 8) as seen throughout a difficult identity-reshaping process.

Contextualising *The Last Peasants*

In defining documentary film as "an instrument of information, education and propaganda as well as a creative treatment of reality" (Hayward 2006: 106), John Grierson managed to capture the paradoxical nature of this type of filmic text as "the site of an irreconcilable union between invention on the one hand and mechanical reproduction on the other" (Renov 1993: 33). Angus Macqueen's *The Last Peasants* trilogy definitely fits into the pattern delineated by Grierson's definition. That implies that, for a better understanding of its meanings, one should proceed to both retrace the "historical real" and the "context of historical forces" (Renov 1993: 25, 29) that determine it, and to identify the aesthetic principles that underlie the films' expressive dimension, influenced by the director's adhering to a certain tradition in documentary film-making as well as by his individual perspective on the represented subject. Moreover, since the films foreground representations of a foreign – here, Romanian – other that lend themselves to an analysis in imagological terms, contextualisation, considering historical factors, "the intertext of a given national representation as trope", the genre conventions and narrative techniques (Leerssen 2007: 28), becomes a must for their interpretation.

Having spent about a year and a half (most likely, between 2000 and 2002 when the film was completed and edited at the October Film production company) in the village of Budeşti, Angus Macqueen focused on the tensions within several families of Romanian peasants (Damian in *Journeys*, Opriş and Bud in *Temptation*, Marica in *A Good Wife*), the younger members of which chose to turn their back on the economic and social hardships marking life in the rural area, in particular, and in the Romanian society still in transition to fully-fledged capitalist relations and democracy, in general, in order to pursue their 'dream' of a prosperous life in the West. Their cases were relevant illustrations of a main trend in emigration flows after the 1989 change of regime in Romania, when Romanians were motivated by economic rather than political reasons (as used to be the case under Ceauşescu's dictatorship) to travel across national borders.

> As the process of transition from the communist regime to a free capitalist market in Romania turned out to be slow and difficult, resulting, among other things, in an increase in unemployment rates and, hence, precarious living conditions for many Romanian workers, emigration came to be

> regarded as the only hope for significant financial gain and a better life. Under the circumstances, depending on factors like age, education, gender, religion, etc., several labour migration trends – permanent/temporary, legal/illegal – developed in time. (Colipcă et al. 2010: 6)

The years immediately following the 1989 Revolution, i.e. 1990-1996, witnessed the beginning of the brain-drain process through the permanent migration of high-education graduates to the USA and Canada, but also to European countries like Germany, as well as "a slow but steady growth in illegal migration, which involved particularly semi- and unskilled Romanian workers, targeting Germany, France, Israel, and, to some extent, Turkey (Baldwin-Edwards, 2005: 2-13, Horváth, 2007: 3)" (Colipcă et al. 2010: 6). Until 2002, though, given the scarcity of opportunities for mass legal migration (no European visa-granting programmes like those developed by the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and relatively few bilateral agreements for temporary legal migration to some European states), the number of Romanians who took the path of illegal (circular) migration to Italy, Spain and Portugal, Hungary, Austria and Germany, or France, Belgium and the UK increased significantly (Simina 2005: 8 and Cojocaru et al. 2006: 5 qtd. in Colipcă and Ivan-Mohor 2009: 3-4). The elimination, in 2002, of the Schengen visa requirement for the legal stay period of three months did not improve the situation but rather favoured the growth of circular migration: many Romanians left the country legally but preferred to stay and work illegally in the European country of their destination after the legal stay period ended. Under the circumstances, such criminal practices as the use of forged or stolen Romanian passports, of fake Irish, Hungarian or Georgian passports or residence cards to cross the Romanian borders endured among those who would return illegally to work on the European black market, after being seized and sent home by the authorities of the EU countries where they initially migrated and prohibited by the Romanian authorities to travel abroad (See the Official Report on *Migration and Asylum in Romania*, 2006: 23 qtd. in Colipcă and Ivan-Mohor 2009: 3).

Unavoidably, Romanians' exodus to the West, with significant impact on both home and host societies, was widely debated in the media. Next to the written press and television, film became a means of representing this multifarious social phenomenon with the aim of drawing attention to its impact on the evolution of cross-cultural interactions and on

the ensuing reshaping of identities in various European spaces. In this context, several documentary filmmakers took interest in Romanian migrants' stories and sought, by bringing them to the screen, to help the audiences, in the receiving countries as well as in Romania as the sending society, to understand "not only [these migrants'] world" but also their own role in it, to "shape [themselves] as public actors" who "need to know in order to act" (Aufderheide 2007: 5, 6).

For Angus Macqueen, who had spent almost twenty years "getting as close as he could to the changes in Eastern Europe" (Adams 2003) starting from "the Solidarity Revolution and Martial Law in Poland, and then the coming of Gorbachev´s Glasnost and Perestroika" (Macqueen 2004), *The Last Peasants* was, next to *Second Russian Revolution* (1991), *The Death of Yugoslavia* (1995), *Dancing for Dollars* (1997), *Loving Lenin* (1998), *Gulag* (1999) and *Vodka* (2000), "part of an ongoing quest (…) eastwards" (Adams 2003) and of "a one-man crusade against [the] indifference" of the Western public to "the uneasy cultural and economic relationships between East and West long after the barriers have come down" (Adams 2004). Aware of the political and social complexities of the Romanians' illegal migration, of the prejudiced reactions of the Western European media to it, sustained by negative stereotypes that largely confined images of Romania to "children with disabilities, homeless people sleeping under bridges, traffickers of human beings, shoplifters, (...) inferior beings living among dead rats in the Parisian slums" (Longin Popescu 2004), the British director decided to raise in the minds of his Western European (primarily British) viewers questions about why Romanians migrated and, in their hearts, the desire to know and understand better these newcomers. Speaking about the educational function of his documentaries, he stated that:

> With *The Last Peasants*, I set myself the task of making an audience fall in love with an illegal immigrant. In Britain, they are usually the subject of lurid headlines about invasions and scroungers. Yet these are the people who clean our houses, dig our gardens, and generally do the jobs we no longer want to. I wanted to understand what drove them from their own homes to the urban squalor that so many live in on the edges of our cities. (Macqueen 2004)

Moreover, if one considers Macqueen's choice of subjects, i.e. Romanian peasants from the village of Budeşti, Maramureş, whose

centuries-old community and lifestyle are doomed to slow degradation against the background of Romania's transformation into a capitalist, consumerist society, one realises that there are further reasons that account for his *Last Peasants* project. The dissolution of the rural community in Budeşti stirred in Angus Macqueen nostalgia for the past and he hoped that his films would equally remind the English viewers of a moment in their own history, when men and women from the English countryside "invaded the slums of industrial towns in the nineteenth century to make a living and transform their lives" (Macqueen 2003: 106). The image of the turn-of-the-millennium Romanian Maramureş looks to Angus Macqueen like "the set for a Thomas Hardy film or an ambitious costume drama, with extras on their horses and carts bouncing along barely treated roads, men scything in the fields and families threshing their wheat in water-driven machines made in the nineteenth century" (Macqueen 2003: 106). He repeatedly expressed his regret that the genuine rural culture of Maramureş, this "utopia in the past" that even Nicolae Ceauşescu's policies of collectivisation, urbanisation and 'systemisation' of Romanian villages had spared, would be destroyed by merely fifteen years of 'democracy', by "the harsh realities of capitalism and competition" (Macqueen 2003: 102, 103).

Also, Macqueen's focus on Romanian peasants inhabiting an exquisitely beautiful area like Maramureş is not entirely divorced from certain tropes dominating the tradition of Romania's representation in the English mindset. One cannot help connecting it back to the 'rather old' history of representing "the identity of the Romanians *as* peasants" in various writings of wide circulation in Western Europe (Drace-Francis 2013: 16). The *topos* of the Romanian peasant having a primitive, agriculture-based lifestyle, yet endowed with eloquence, innocence and other simple virtues that make him "the idyllic counterpoint to the corrupt and greedy city-dwellers" and to the civilized West that remains indifferent to his sufferings can be clearly retraced from the classical to the nineteenth-century (French and English) writers (Drace-Francis 2013: 19, 31). Yet, as Alex Drace-Francis remarks,

> (...) as post-Romantic writers in the West but even more acutely in Romania, would try to invest the peasant with value *qua* peasant, they would come up against a new paradox (...): that to praise the peasant way of life and at the same time attempt to encourage the peasant to actually

> adhere to it, was actually to force him to remain a barbarian and an outsider to the empire. (2003: 25)

Angus Macqueen does not negate the Western tradition in the representation of the Romanian peasants. His filmic narratives actually echo it: "the perfect peasants" of Maramureş (Macqueen 2003: 102) still largely live off subsistence agriculture, build their own wooden houses, keep livestock, distil and drink their own brandy, in contrast to their city-dwelling co-nationals, as well as to the city-dominated West, already 'contaminated' by consumerism and globalisation (though to different extents). It is this temptation of the West with its enticing glamour and commodities that causes the rupture in the collective society of the Romanian peasants and condemns the Romanian migrants to a lonely, miserable life, separated from their families and vilified by their European hosts, transformed into outsiders within the EU 'empire'.

On the other hand, he implicitly acknowledges that these people cannot be forced to live in 'primitive' conditions once they have got the 'taste' of freedom and opportunities that the change of regime and the opening to the West promise, especially since the local industry has crumbled and has very little to offer to those who seek employment. He seems to have seen in that, as previously mentioned, an effect of 'history repeating itself' only in another part of Europe.

Nevertheless, his vision remains entangled in the paradoxes that characterise the peasant myth: while militating in favour of not forcing Romanian peasants to remain 'barbarian' and outsiders to the EU 'empire', encouraging his viewers to sympathise with Romanian peasants turned migrants and, why not, even to help them integrate in the multicultural melting pot of Western Europe, he laments the slow extinction of the peasant way of life and obliquely implies that Romanians and the rest of the Europeans altogether should save it and embrace it while they still can (see also Longin Popescu 2004).

Actually, one has to 'read' the ultimate message of Macqueen's films between images and sounds. In order to show how some of the Romanian migrants' lives might relate to those of the Western European audiences, how what happens in Romania affects what is happening in the Western European countries of the migrants' destination (see Adams 2003), the British director chose to resort to a combination of the observational

and participatory modes[2] in his documentary trilogy. The dominant seems to be observational or direct cinema filming, minimizing the interventions of the filmmaker in the process of "document[ing] the inner lives of ordinary people" (Winston 2011: 88-89). The 'direct', ethnographic gaze of the British outsider (see Hayward 2006: 120) on the small peasant community of Budeşti, allowed for by the use of light, hand-held cameras, reveals a slice of life events, more often than not leaving the filmmaker in the position of a mere observer who does not interfere with the action. Probably the most eloquent evidence of Macqueen's adhering to the principles of direct cinema and of "journalistic non-interference" is his recording, in *The Last Peasants. Journeys*, of Ion Damian's "brutal journey" to the West:

> "I could have got [Ion and his friends] to Paris. But you have to just let them do what they do. You cannot help. Not least because you would be breaking the law" [Macqueen says]. He and his assistant producer posed as a honeymoon couple on the continental train, waving a hand-held camera about, never drawing attention to the real subject of their film. (Adams 2003)

Keeping voice-over narrating to a minimum, only to fill in information gaps and to explicitly set the frame of action, as well as recording direct sound at the time of filming, equally contribute to creating the impression that the British filmmaker "attempts not to interpret for the viewer nor to cheat in what [he] shows" (Hayward 2006: 120).

Yet, there are, especially in *The Last Peasants. Journeys*, enough instances that pertain to the participatory (cinéma-vérité) sociological investigation. For instance, the presence of the camera and of the filming crew is recognised by Petru and Ion Damian when they are asked questions about their reasons for migrating and the impact of migration on their families. Also, a conversation with Ion Damian's son, Vasiluc, rendered in voice-over, equally emphasises the occasional interaction of the filmmaker with his subjects. Thus, the audiences may equally get a sense of how situations in the film are influenced by the filmmaker's presence (See Hayward 2006: 76-77 and Nichols 2001: 33, 115-123).

Altogether, this mixture of rhetorical strategies characteristic of the observational and participatory modes serves a double goal: to give voice to Macqueen's subjects that are twice peripheral – as inhabitants of a rural

area distant from Bucharest, the centre of power in Romania, and as Romanian migrants coming from a country in the margin of Europe, who, at the time of filming, had not yet gained the status of EU citizens – and to put forward an alternative version of the 'history' of major social phenomena in post-Communist Romania like the disintegration of the rural communities and labour (internal/external, legal/ illegal) migration.

'Home', the West and the Romanian migrant in *The Last Peasants. Journeys*

Like the other two films – *Temptation*[3] and *A Good Wife* – in Angus Macqueen's *The Last Peasants* trilogy, *Journeys* does not rely on the hegemonic and institutionalized 'side' of the story of Romanians' migration at the turn of the millennium but foregrounds the private stories of the Damian family from Budeşti, Maramureş, whose life is conflict-ridden and ultimately wrecked by lack of prospects at home and the mirage of the West.

One storyline focuses on Petru Damian, his wife Maria and his son Adrian. They are the 'lucky' ones who managed to migrate illegally to France, most likely about 1995[4]. Unfortunately, they run out of 'luck' there as Petru is arrested by the French authorities. Yet, he manages to escape and makes it to Dublin. The family is thus torn apart, and Petru and Maria get to live separate lives in Dublin and Paris, respectively. Alone in Paris, Maria sets as her main goal that of making a good living for herself and her son Adrian.

A second storyline reveals the attempts of migrating of Petru's brother, Ion Damian, and of his wife, also called Maria. Ion is very confident that he can get a visa for France in exchange for 2,300 German marks. His departure has, nonetheless, to be postponed: his father, Vasile Damian, dies and, since he is his old mother's only help, he has to stay by her. After the period of mourning is over, Ion and two younger men from the village set out with a guide who promises to get them to Italy. They travel across Hungary under the train, holding tight to some wagon pipes, perfectly aware that the slightest mistake might cost them their lives. Unfortunately, the guide abandons them in Vienna five minutes before the departure of the train to Italy and steals Ion's bag. They try to make it on

their own to Paris, but are seized by the German police on the train and repatriated.

Disappointed by Ion's failure, his wife Maria decides she should try her luck and leave abroad. She borrows money to buy false travel papers from a local middleman. But she is not lucky either: a week later, she is told that the man arranging for her passport was arrested. So, heavily in debt, she has to get used to the idea of going on with her life in the village, next to her husband and her children.

That these private stories acquire "evidential force" (Renov 1993: 28) within the frame of social transformations and cultural clashes related to Romanians' emigration to Western Europe countries is subtly suggested by the use of setting and sound that lends circular structure to the filmic narrative while drawing attention to the double perspective – of the Romanian ('Home') community and of the Romanian diaspora in the host societies – from which emigration, as the main theme of the documentary, is regarded. The film begins with the image of Ion Damian, as he goes alone to cut grass in the pastures that cover the green hills of Budeşti. He walks towards the camera, his scythe on the shoulder, and stops to scrutinize, with a concerned look on his face, what lies ahead, an uncertain future as a migrant, irrespective of destination, that his voice-over points to:

> Pân' ajung de-atâtea ori mai fac. Risc de câte ori ... de câte ori trebuie să risc, de-atâtea ori risc. Pân' ajung. Odată tot ajung. Videm [sic] cum: sub tren, deasupra trenului... Oriunde, numai s-ajung. [English subtitles: I'll keep trying till I get there. However dangerous it is. I'll keep trying. I'll go the West in the end. On a train, under the train... Whatever it takes.] (Macqueen 2002)

Key visual elements subtly hint at Ion's split self-identity, caught between his rural roots – he's still wearing the traditional, Maramureş-specific hat, the "clop" – and the influence of urban life, visible in the rest of his outfit, i.e. his more practical, casual sweater and leather jacket rather reminiscent of a town-dweller's clothing. The sun set over the picturesque landscape of Budeşti, symbolically insinuating into the visual text Ion's hopelessness and, at the same time, the sense of the gradual disappearance of the rural culture that he belongs to threatened by the "inexorable pull of urban capitalism" (Adams 2003) and of the 'Western European dream'. Actually, the sunset functions as a graphic match, doubled by a 'sonic match' provided by tense,

increasingly louder extradiegetic music, connecting the image of 'Home' to that of the West, here represented by Paris, glimpsed at from a revolving carousel cabin. Thus, the visual and the auditive tracks render the same feelings of loss of hope and loneliness: ironically, even if the 'dream' of going West is fulfilled, living among the splendours of the West (here, La Tour Eiffel, l'Arc de Triomphe, the obelisk in the Place de la Concorde, the Seine) does not bring about the happiness and prosperity that the migrants expected. The case of Maria and Adrian, Petru Damian's wife and son, both illegal migrants in Paris, is relevant in this respect: as the end of the film reveals, they are the ones contemplating the impressive Parisian scenery from the height of the carousel cabin. Maria makes plans for their future: they will apply for papers and get all they need, a proper job and a proper flat, but these achievements belong to an indefinite, uncertain future that scares Maria, if one were to take connotatively her final remarks. Ultimately, neither staying home – like Ion Damian, who fails to emigrate – nor reaching the West seems to bring a sense of fulfilment to Romanian peasants who seek to re-shape their identity by crossing the borders between the rural and the urban, East and West, periphery and centre. That may account for the heavy silence, broken only by the selective sound of the swishing of Ion's scythe, with which the film ends.

In its triptych-like structure, Macqueen's documentary adds more 'flesh' to the initially barely suggested representations of 'Home' and the West (as previously commented upon). Part I actually begins with scenes of everyday life in the Maramureş countryside in late autumn, set amidst charming hills, with large pastures, orchards and haystacks, yet full of hardships. Visual symbolism is again instrumental in reinforcing the idea of a world trapped between the rural traditions and the urban progress, between the poverty and miserable life conditions in the Romanian village, as consequences of economic decline, and the 'mirage' of globalizing tendencies: several children play football, perhaps dreaming of becoming great football players when they grow up, yet their game does not take place on a proper football field, but in the muddy streets of Budeşti, among stacks of wood logs. The rolling ball in itself, repeatedly shot in close up, may be said to be indicative of the passage of time and of the changes that the rural Romanian community has undergone in time. And while some children are playing, others are working hard by their parents' and grandparents' side, their image being accompanied by the narrator's plain

description (in voice-over) of the economic and social context that favours post-1989 migration to the West:

> Since the fall of Communism, the villagers have had hard times to find work outside the village. Now most families rely on money sent home by someone working illegally in Western Europe. (Macqueen 2002)

The sequence presenting life in Ion Damian's family is symptomatic of the dramatic deterioration of life conditions in the Romanian countryside. Living off a small piece of land, Ion and Maria Damian have to work hard to support their two children, Vasiluc and Măriuca, whom they love and would like to see properly educated. That is why, when Vasiluc offers to help his father to cut wood for the fire, he is sent to prepare his homework. Paradoxically, despite their good intentions, the parents painfully discover that their endeavours are still not enough to ensure the best conditions for their children's education when Vasiluc brings to their attention the fact that he does not even have a school bag; they can only hope that he will get one from school.

Following the "circular, seasonal lives" of the Budeşti community (Adams 2003), the film proposes a typical ethnographic gaze on local customs like the annual brandy distilling around Christmas, introduced by Dumitru Fărcaş's melancholy, Maramureş-specific tárogató music. Apart from emphasising cultural specificity, the sequence allows a closer examination of people's reactions to the changes in their lifestyle, marked, next to economic decline and increasing poverty, by political confusion. Besides putting forth a not very flattering stereotypical image of Romanian men as alcohol-addicted and fond of politics (in line with the saying according to which all Romanians are good at football and politics), it reveals the peasants' concern about finding an explanation for the course of events in post-1989 Romania and about making the best choices for the future that would entail an improvement of their life conditions. Thus, the peasants gathered around the distilling machine democratically express their political orientations with regard to the coming elections: the references to Paul of Romania, Hohenzollern, and Ion Iliescu as candidates to the presidential elections indirectly point to the temporal frame of the depicted events, i.e. November-December 2000. Ion Damian, in particular, without explicitly siding with left-wing party leaders, cannot refrain,

however, from voicing his outrage at the disastrous social and economic consequences of the transition from Communism to globalizing capitalism:

> Păi nu vezi... nu vezi c-o fost complexul cel mai mare de porci, o fost al doilea din Europa şi l-o distrus. Păi da' nu... nu contează că l-o vândut, da' noi amu trebuie să aducem de la unguri carne. [English subtitles: We had one of the biggest pig farms in Europe. The democrats destroyed it. They went and sold it. Now we have to import pork from Hungary.] (Macqueen 2002)

His speech occasionally acquires overtones of nostalgia for the Communist regime that may be accounted for by the loss of stability and financial security that he experienced after its fall:

> Păi demult boierii ceia şi-o făcut palate şi-o avut tot ce-o vrut şi săracii o lucrat la ei că n-o avut ce face. Păi normal că comuniştii o naționalizat. De ce să stai tu în 50 de camere? Las să stea şi cel ce n-are. Nu? [English subtitles: In the old days, the rich built palaces and we were their servants. Communists stopped all that. Why should one family have fifty rooms?] (Macqueen 2002)

Christmas celebration is symbolically associated with the 'good news' regarding an opportunity of migrating for Ion Damian. When he brings home the Christmas tree, Ion informs his family that he might get a chance to emigrate illegally. The wife, Maria, is very enthusiastic and approves all the steps that Ion says he will have to take in order to gather the very large sum of money necessary to pay for the fake visa. Even the children are happy that their father will migrate at the thought that he will send them money and presents and that, maybe, they will even spend the next Christmas together in another country. One can easily guess from Ion's gestures as he speaks about his departure (joking with Vasiluc, caressing and kissing Măriuca) the reasons why he is determined to take such a big step: as he plainly states later in the film, it is his desire to offer his children decent living conditions, comfort and proper education that drives him on to face the risks of such a journey across national borders.

Another 'Home'-related sequence from the end of Part I is endowed with a two-fold function: it adds to the ethnographic/anthropological concern with "uncontaminated cultural practices" (Aufderheide, 2007: 106) that the modern world could not yet destroy and reveals the reason why Ion Damian's first plans of migrating are thwarted. Ironically, at a moment

when nature seems to come back to life after the long winter, when the mountain stream flows among ice-covered rocks (another symbol of the inexorable passage of time) and small birds are looking for food among the leaves that come out from under the melting snow, death strikes man unexpectedly. The image of the barren trees and the Maramureş-specific threnody announce the death of the family patriarch, Vasile Damian, at the age of 71. The funeral, which is presented in all its details, is attended by the entire village. Friends and neighbours stand by the side of Vasile Damian's wife, son, Ion, and daughter-in-law, Maria, accompany the dead on his last journey by singing sad, lamenting songs and playing their alphorns (*trâmbițe*, specific to Northern Romania). Yet, no member of the other son, Petru's family is able to attend the funeral: for them, returning to Romania would be the end of the 'Western adventure'. As a matter of fact, one could speculate that Vasile Damian's death epitomizes the very disappearance of an entire generation. As in *Temptation*, in the allegorical pattern in which Angus Macqueen shapes his subjects' stories to construct the image of a once immutable way of life at 'Home', which seemed to belong to a world of myth rather than to changeable reality, winter evokes "the breach between God and man, between parents and children who are doomed to pay for their original sin (which they assume) wondering across the land" (Colipcă 2010: 76). With the patriarchal father figure gone, the mother is reduced to a helpless, passive, silent observer of her family's dissolution in the process of evolution from the 'old' large-power distance to the 'new' small-power distance culture (see Hofstede 1991). The only thing she can do is, as shown at the beginning of Part III, to pray for the forgiveness of her children's sins and their safe return home. Her image on her knees and her voice-over reciting "The Lord's Prayer" also bring to the audiences' attention another stereotypical feature of Romanians, i.e. their being fervent Orthodox believers.

Like his brother and other young men from the village, Ion Damian renounces his parents' way of living and tries to rise up to his family's expectations by setting out on a journey to the West, presented in Part II. His previous hesitations in taking action in this respect had already led to 'trouble in paradise' as his wife Maria, more ambitious and prone to challenge established patterns and to embrace individualism, grew disappointed with him and blamed him for not being as determined as his brother Petru. For her, as for the rest of community, Petru, now "rich in

euros, is a hero" (Adams 2003). Unfortunately, Maria blinds herself to the consequences of Petru's 'determination', i.e. his marriage falling apart. When he finally decides he should go, Ion does it with the hope that thus he will be able to better provide for his children. As a conversation with Ion's son Vasiluc indicates, though not very enthusiastic about his father's departure, the boy approves of it and wishes his father could earn more money so that they could keep up with the progress of the 'civilized' society. (His uncle sent him a mobile phone and he expects his father to send him money for a professional mountain bike with 30 gears.)

In a striking sequence of great emotional impact which relies on the juxtaposition of live sound and close-ups on the wheels and tracks as the train speeds to the West, the filmmaker adds Ion's voice-over to let the viewers know how he travelled five hours hanging on to the underside of a train, risking his life to get to Vienna. There is no wonder that, when he is next shown speaking to the camera, Ion seems to be in a rather bad shape. He is in a hotel room in Vienna with the two other men who chose the same way out of Romania. Ion is very tired, smokes and sighs a lot, and that betrays the fact that things did not go exactly as planned. As he confesses to the camera, the guide ditched them and stole his bag. He is disoriented and desperate. So, he asks for advice from his brother Petru: thus, they are instructed to buy tickets for Paris, to stay calm and not to stand out at the station or during the trip to avoid drawing the attention of police patrols; if they manage to pass unnoticed and they reach Paris, they will be helped by Maria, Petru's wife. His brother's advice and blessing, as well as the thought that he must sacrifice everything for his children's future (which moves him to tears), determine Ion to take further action and to try to get to Paris after all. As in the closed space of the hotel room, in the open space of the railway station the three migrants continue to be overwhelmed with fear. The sequence that shows them finally on the train to Paris conveys particularly Ion's great joy of having managed to leave the Vienna station and to cross Austria without being caught. Yet, as the beginning of Part III discloses, joy will soon be replaced by the agony of being stopped before reaching the French border.

Ion's and his youngest companion's return to Budeşti, which opens Part III, seems to be a reason for joy only for their old mothers and Ion's children. Coming home late in the evening as if ashamed and unwilling to be seen, the two men share with their families their 'adventures': how they

were arrested when Ion paid a visit to his friend in his compartment (their third companion, Ionuc, luckily escaped), how they were mistreated by the German police, sent back to Romania and spent six days in jail. As he tells his story to an 'audience' formed by his wife Maria, his two children, his own mother and his friend's mother, Ion seems to be torn apart between the joy of seeing and kissing his children again and outrage at being misjudged by the German other. His story foregrounds one of the negative stereotypes of the Romanian migrant as the police patrol abusively generalize in calling Ion and his companion "criminals". As Macqueen explains,

> Ion was shocked to realize that the moment he got to the West, under a train, he had become a criminal in the eyes of the state and of many people around him. 'Romanians are criminals, that is what everyone thinks,' murmurs Ion in muted horror when he returns home as a deportee. These economic migrants are cast into a legal minefield whose logic few of them understand. (2003: 106)

The dissolution of the rural community, with its large power distance and strict gender hierarchies is again suggestively hinted at by the focus, in this context, on the attitude of Maria, Ion's wife. Unlike her children who fall asleep happy that their father is back, she is bitterly disappointed by Ion's failure. Instead of comforting him, she anxiously asks him if he would leave again. She openly claims she has no intention of staying any more in this "bloody" country and, when her husband braves saying she would not last for five minutes abroad, she dares him, mocking at his manliness and reproaching him that he acted without thinking first. To save face in front of his friend and relatives, Ion puts an end to the discussion announcing (without enthusiasm) that they will try to leave again.

However, as he delays the next attempt to reach the West and seems rather tempted to return to the 'old ways' (he is shown alone on the hill cutting grass or leading the cows to the pasture), Maria, who is determined to turn her back on the poverty and 'primitivism' of the rural culture of the East and to embrace change, progress and the promise of a better/more prosperous life in the West, decides to take things in her own hands and to emigrate, even at the expense of her family's financial stability and emotional balance. Though the family is already heavily in debt, she does

not seem to care and borrows the equivalent of two years' income to buy false travel papers. Already turned into a 'bad wife', she gets carried away with the dreams of self-fulfilment and disruption of gender hierarchies to the point that she becomes a bad mother too. She has been definitely seduced by the new life 'philosophy' according to which "we should earn more money, we should change, we should progress" (Adams 2003). The fact that she is about to become a different woman is subtly pointed at by images of Maria, speaking on the phone with her brother-in-law Petru, without wearing – for the first time in the film – the scarf to cover her head and many clothes to cover her skin: her hair is loose and she is wearing a silky, sleeveless blue blouse. She openly confesses:

> Abia aştept, măi, ... păi eu cred că nu mai... nu mai am niciun chef să lucru-n România. Amu aşa m-aş duce... [English subtitles: I can't go on working here. I've just got to get away.] (Macqueen 2002)

She is blinded by envy when she sees other people having cars and no cares, all in all, living a good life off the money sent by members of their families who migrated abroad. Petru's warning that she should be careful because the illegal migration business is controlled by the Mafia obviously disconcerts her, but is not enough to make her change her mind, so she goes on with her plans. As she is supposed to travel as a Western business woman, she hitches to the local town to prepare, i.e. to buy clothes and make-up. The sequence that shows Maria putting on her make-up at home prefigures the extent to which she will change, provided she manages to get abroad. Almost ignoring her husband, who watches her sadly but silently, and her mother-in-law, still dressed in mourning clothes, who observes her from a distance with a blank stare on her face, Maria carefully applies the make-up, mimicking TV show hosts, and she is so taken with her own artificial beauty that she cannot even stand the children next to her. Their naïve questions about the use of make-up bother her and she goes as far as brutally pushing away her daughter when, curious about the small boxes and lipsticks she has never seen before, she tries to touch her mother's staff or interposes between her mother and the mirror. Maria's rejection triggers the children's defensively scornful reaction – Vasiluc asks if they will put her as a scarecrow in the field – which Ion shares completely (they all laugh at her) and which she chooses to ignore, as she is too busy wondering whether she looks like 'a real woman'.

The filmmaker's skilful handling of visual symbolism is obvious again at the end of the film when the image of red apples at the beginning of the fall conveys Biblical connotations of temptation and sin (the fall of woman from the Garden of Eden). However, when the narrator's voice-over cuts in, the viewers find out that, a week later, Maria's hopes are destroyed by the news that the man arranging for her passport was arrested, so she lost the money. Hence, the next frame focuses on her, back in her countryside-specific clothes, her hair covered by a scarf, 'paying for her sin', working in silence on the hill, in the company of another woman, to gather the fallen apples from the orchard.

Crosscutting is used to shift from one storyline to another and to alternate thus the images of 'Home' with those of the illegal Romanian migrants who strive to make a living in the West. Petru Damian, Ion's brother, and his family are, this time, in focus. In the first Romanian diaspora-related sequence, Irish music and a puppet show with two green paper-made leprechauns announce the change of setting to Ireland, where Petru settled (apparently about 1998). Petru is filmed in situations that are representative for his condition as an illegal migrant. On the one hand, he is shown manoeuvring a floor polishing machine, while his voice-over reveals that he lives a lonely life, trapped in the circle of work – going home – getting some sleep – back to work again. "Petru seems to have traded the Spartan Arcadia of his village for an invisible and lonely life on the most inhospitable margins of a distant city" (Adams 2003) and a close-up on the brand of the floor polisher, "Victor", is used by the British filmmaker to ironically suggest that what to Petru's family back home appears to be a 'victory', i.e. his succeeding to migrate to the West, is hardly that. As a matter of fact, Petru wants to keep himself constantly busy to avoid thinking of home and of his wife and son, whom he left behind in Paris. He even avoids opening the subject in his filmed confession: "Nu prea am timpul ăsta de a mă gândi la anumite probleme." [English subtitles: "I don't have time to feel anything."] (Macqueen 2002) His only connections with 'Home' and his family are: the TV programmes (while he stays at his desk checking his balance sheet and counting money, he listens to the comments made on the performance of a Romanian gymnast in a sports competition); the mobile phone (he is shown several times talking on the phone with his wife, his brother or his sister-in-law); and a few photos. The pictures of his wife and son lie scattered on a small table, next to his

favourite armchair, among chocolate boxes and Irish symbols, chief among which one deserves special attention: the small clay figurine of a policeman, which somewhat reminds Petru all the time of his being an illegal migrant who has to keep a low profile to avoid being arrested and repatriated.

On the other hand, as the Irish host space is perceived as either alienating (Petru is mostly shown alone) or subtly threatening (as the symbolism of the policeman figurine suggests), Petru tries to integrate in the local group of Romanian migrants whom he joins for a party at Megan's Pub. Images of the party contribute to reinforcing other stereotypical representations of the Romanians as party and drink-lovers (a Gypsy singer cheers the guests with a drinking song), but, at the same time, through the choice of participatory filmmaking that brings about a direct encounter between the interviewer and the interviewee, they also disclose the sad stories behind this show of joyful appearances. Thus, the viewers find out that Petru considers migration a risky enterprise that requires much sacrifice, but which has to be undertaken if one wants to fulfil one's dreams. However, when the interviewer tests the strength of Petru's belief in the subsequent benefits of the sacrifice he has made by asking questions about his wife and son, Petru looks down as if ashamed or unable to face the truth and gives a laconic answer ("Bine. Adrian îi la şcoală, foarte bine. [English subtitles: "They're fine. Adrian is in school now. He's doing very well."] (Macqueen 2002), before he sinks in silence, nervously playing with his glass of wine on the table. As in the phone conversations with his wife Maria, shown later, in Part III, Petru opts for such rhetorical strategies as vagueness and silence, indicative of the fact that, for him, separation from his loved ones is difficult to bear, hence a subject to be avoided.

At the end of Part I, Petru's isolation is revealed to be all the more painful as he cannot even attend his father's funeral. He has to live with this burden and to picture the funeral from the photos and the tape sent by his brother. During the funeral procession, his father's last letter to his family is publicly read: he thanked his wife and his children for all the help they gave him in life and asked for their forgiveness. Stricken with grief and with the irony of the situation – his father thanked him, though he could not be there by his side to help him through his illness or to bury him – Petru covers his eyes and mourns, though too late, his father.

The loneliness and inner suffering that an illegal migrant separated from his/her family must painfully cope with also surface in the sequences that focus on Petru's wife Maria and their son Adrian, in Paris. In Part I, a tension-building segue adds to a setting-changing cut from Dublin to Paris introducing Maria. Her interview, overlapping images that show her taking the underground train to go to work, always travelling mostly in the company of other (black, Asian, Arabian) migrants/representatives of marginal social groups, clearly reveals her feeling an outsider ("Eram foarte, foarte străină. ["I felt such an outsider."] (Macqueen 2002) and her sense of insecurity, as she obsessively points out that she is "not OK". Nonetheless, she has to make a living and to support her son, hence she works as a housekeeper/ domestic cleaner. Maria's case provides Angus Macqueen with an opportunity to show "how different European nations adopt wholly different policies to their migrant workers". In turn-of-the-millennium France, for instance, illegal migrant workers like Maria were tolerated as long as they did not cause any trouble. "If they made an application for asylum, however, or were stopped in the market place, they would be immediately deported" (Adams 2003)[5]. That accounts for Maria's painful awareness of her illegal status and constant fear of being arrested and sent home.

Like the frames shot on the train, those showing Maria walking in the Parisian streets offer the filmmaker an opportunity to put together a more complete picture of the cultural diversity characterizing the migrant communities in Paris, all sharing precarious living conditions for which tired faces, beggars and children sleeping on the pavement are metonymically symbolic of, but also to emphasise a certain sense of solidarity among migrants as Maria shares her umbrella with a young man while they are waiting for the red light to change. The rap song that accompanies this sequence, raising issues of differences in values, legal status ("sans-papiers") and hardships of life for the migrants and all other marginal categories, reinforces the message and enhances the emotional impact aimed at empathic unsettlement.

Another sequence allows discussing representations of Maria's life as a migrant woman in terms of her relationship with her son Adrian. Her motivation for migrating is obviously strictly related to the hope of an improvement in the family's financial status and the desire of better providing, together with her husband, for their son Adrian's needs. She is

not animated, initially at least, by the wish to challenge the gender role system in the Romanian patriarchal society. As a matter of fact, throughout her long stay in Paris, she remains faithful to her husband, though he is away in Dublin, and shows her elderly in-laws, with whom she keeps in touch by phone, due respect, behaving hence according to the principles of the large power-distance society she comes from. Her conversation on the phone with her mother-in-law reveals her a sensitive woman who suffers at the thought that her marriage is falling apart – whenever asked about her relationship with Petru, she is rather vague and changes subject – and who desperately tries to gather all her strength to survive and to provide for her son. She cannot allow herself to be overwhelmed with despair and homesickness, so she wipes her tears and gets back to work.

After the forced separation from Petru, Maria's entire life revolves around her son Adrian and it is out of motherly love that she, as an example of a good mother, reacts against the established norms of her community, refusing to send her son to work. Her desire to offer him a better life and education keeps her going on, even when, as a migrant, she has to assume the risk of experiencing humiliation and even violence. At some point, in Part III, she tells some of her friends how she was attacked, robbed and beaten in an underground station. As her illegal migrant status prevented her from asking for help from the police or the medical system, she had to manage then on her own and this made her all the more bitterly aware of her isolation, vulnerability and double victimization (as a migrant and as a woman). (see also Colipcă 2010: 265)

The third part of the film actually invites the examination in the mirror of the two sisters-in-law, Petru's wife, the migrant, and Ion's wife, the would-be migrant, who have the same name, Maria, connoting "the prototype of the patriarchally constructed obedient, hard-working woman from the countryside" (Colipcă et al. 2010: 64). In both women's cases, sooner or later, the dream of fulfilment in the West becomes the source of rebellion against the established gender order. Unlike Ion's Maria, who rapidly evolves into the bad wife carried away by the obsession to live the 'Western European dream', Petru's Maria initially rises (as previously shown) to the expectations implied in the connotations of her name, but eventually she does change, slowly yet surely, her mentality. She left for France with her husband and child looking forward to a life together sharing the advantages and disadvantages of a migrant's status. She admits

that she thought of France as of a mirage (an idea equally emphasised through the association of the image of Maria walking in the street on her way to work with diegetic music, as two street accordion players play "Over the Rainbow"):

> În satul meu era un proverb că o să facem ceva numai când o să ajungem la Paris. Pentru că atunci credeam că nu o s-ajungem niciodată. [English subtitles: In the village, we had a saying: 'I'll do it when I get to Paris.' Because we believed we'd never get there.] (Macqueen 2002)

Ironically, the life she lived in Paris, working illegally to support her son Adrian and without having Petru by her side, is hardly 'the dream that she dreamt of'. Still, after five years of life without her husband, she seems to have grown more independent: a hint in this respect is provided by her dressing style, which is not very sophisticated, but quite elegant and, anyway, completely different from the traditional folk costume she probably used to wear in the village. In addition, she finally dares to challenge her husband's authority as the head of the family. She has a hard time putting up with his silence, which she taxes as lack of affection and detachment from family problems. Over the phone, she reproaches him that he does not know what it feels to be hurt inside and she is very bothered by his laconic, vague replies and his forced laughter; in fact, Petru's reaction proves, as previously mentioned, that he cannot cope with the situation. Already upset about Petru's not joining her and Adrian in Paris, she is even more outraged by the gossip back home: she is rumoured to have filed for divorce and, thus, implicitly forced into the stereotypical frame of the easy woman. Having undergone acculturation, she has managed to move from the 'mental software' of the large power distance and collectivist patterns characterising the sending society to that of small power distance and individualism dominating the French society (see Hofstede 1991). She explicitly states:

> Dar eu i-am spus ca nu mă interesează de nimeni, absolut de nimeni, decât de mine, de viaţa mea, de Adrian. Eu nu pot ... pentru că eu, când am fost agresată la metrou şi mi-o furat geanta, şi m-o strâns de gât şi m-o bătut, şi am stat în casă o săptămână, n-o venit nimeni să-mi deie un gram de apă. Cine o venit, pe ăla o să ajut. [English subtitles: I told him I don't care about anything, just about myself. Just me, my life and Adrian. No one did a thing when I was attacked in the subway. I was

> strangled, beaten up. I had to stay at home for a week. I only help those who help me.] (Macqueen 2002)

That the receiving society has remained indifferent to her problems, to the isolation and marginalisation that she is condemned to, subtly hinted at in the film by the absence of sequences showing Maria's interaction with the French hosts, is also confirmed by her seeking comfort in the company of other Romanian migrants. Her friends in Paris, in whose families a certain balance in the domestic sphere has been achieved by the husbands' direct involvement in taking care of the children, as a step forward towards the feminine type of culture developed by the French, encourage Maria to divorce Petru, to liberate herself from a marriage that can no longer make her happy and to get on with her life. That, for Maria, Petru Damian's wife, means, as her previous statement clearly shows, to be, above all, a good mother for her son Adrian and sets her, once more, in contrast to her sister-in-law, Ion Damian's wife, who seems ready to reject and even abandon her children to 'emancipate' herself from the bonds of her 'Home' culture and to embrace the 'Western ways'.

The end of the film unites in a visually impressive sequence images of the sad, disrupted lives of the two related families, Petru's and Ion's. Petru is shown all dressed up, but alone going to what appears to be a church and joining the parishioners who sing a religious song in French. This is his way of maintaining an emotional bond with his family in France. Maria and Adrian spend some time together watching the Parisian panorama. She tries to keep her spirits up making plans for the future, but she is afraid and her asking her son to hold her hand as they reach the top of the carousel might be indicative of her relying on her son's support to go on through this difficult period in their lives. Ion, who has resumed his habit of wearing the "clop" - another sign of his resignation and return to a traditional way of life – is deep in thought, unable to enjoy the splendid landscape that surrounds him, and works hard in silence to provide for his family. The conclusion, rather implicit, is that, far from fulfilling people's dreams, migration has brought about pain, estrangement and the destruction of family bonds.

Concluding Remarks

In *The Last Peasants. Journeys*, the stories of the Damians from the village of Budeşti, Maramureş, allow Angus Macqueen to raise questions regarding the death of the rural culture in Romania, labour migration to Western Europe, as well as the process of (re)construction of the migrants' identity as influenced by gender and cultural differences in particular. His filmic text is largely underlain by such dichotomic oppositions as old/young, man/woman, rural/urban, legal/illegal, centre/periphery, East/West, and its rhetorical strategies, chief among which the exploration of spaces – public/private, open/closed – and the use of music and sound effects, definitely arrest the attention of the audiences. In many ways, this film – like the whole *The Last Peasants* trilogy – implicitly acknowledges that the Western Europeans' images of Romania as the East had not changed even at the turn of the new millennium. As Joep Leerssen puts it:

> The implicit European self-image is one of a separation between an ordered interior world, ruled by laws and by domestic values, a household with a centre of gravity in traditional authority, and cordoned off from an unordered outside where only the law of the jungle applies. (…) Outside this ordered world of domesticity are nomads, displaced or placeless strangers, who live in non-houses, whose fires are not on a hearth but under the open skies, and whose behaviour is wild, lawless, unregulated, and transgressive. In this stereotypical self–other opposition, Europe's ultimate Stranger is the Displaced Person… (2017: 22-23)

The illegal migrants 'flooding' the Western European countries coming from post-Communist Romania regarded as still 'non-Europe' in the early 2000s, when it had not joined the European Union yet, were, then, strangers condemned to marginalisation, hence, as already mentioned, the lack of any images of interactions between the Romanian migrants and their hosts, the former being shown mostly as victims of loneliness and isolation, occasional socialization being limited to the Romanian diaspora. Western Europe's 'centrality', "carry[ing] with it the connotation of dynamism and development" (Leerssen 2000: 277) is shown to be definitely well-rooted in the Western European self-image, as well as in the 'mental software' of the Romanian other, irresistibly lured by the mirage of the 'Western European dream'. Post-Communist Romania at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century remains the periphery and

Macqueen's choice of his subjects as peasants seems to reinforce its stereotypical image as "timeless", "backward" and "traditional" (Leerssen 2000: 277).

Set in a picturesque, idyllic landscape, the rural world that the Damians belong to moves slowly, living "from season to season, from harvest to harvest, without thinking about progress, about altering their lifestyle" (Macqueen qtd. in Longin Popescu 2004) until "the great moment of change" comes and the young generation, finding their archaic culture more of a burden, seeks to replace it with the glamour of consumerism. Altogether, the vision that lies at the heart of this largely observational, occasionally participatory, documentary is not exactly unproblematic. It is true that it aims to deconstruct the romanticised image of an idyllic countryside, reminiscent of nostalgia for a distant past, and to create "a conflict" in the minds and hearts of the turn-of-the-millennium Western European – especially British –audiences by showing them that it is hard to live without all the commodities that about a hundred years of capitalism and consumerism had got them used to.

It also records Romanian customs and a cultural heritage that seem doomed to be lost in time owing to spreading capitalism and globalization. But, at the same time, it subtly pleads for the revival of the pastoral way of life and the 'return to the land' in the Romanian countryside, if only half-way, as long as that can ensure the 'new peasants' a decent income and living conditions, and for the sake of re-establishing a bond with nature and the cycle of the seasons (entirely lost in Western countries) (see Macqueen qtd. in Longin Popescu 2004). Beyond that, the greatest merit of *Journeys* and of the whole *The Last Peasants* trilogy lies in the lesson that could still appeal to the audiences even now, more than ten years after Romania's accession to the European Union: for the Romanians, to be proud of their culture and their past, and to treasure them, and for the Western public, to change their attitudes towards the foreign other and to become more tolerant and open to cross-cultural dialogue.

Notes

1. 2003 – Prix Europa IRIS for TV non-fiction, BFI Grierson Best Documentary Series Award, Royal Television Society Awards for Photography, Editing and Team – Best Documentary Series Award; 2004 – the First Annual Directors' Guild of Great Britain DGGB Awards – Best Documentary Award.

2. According to Bill Nichols, there are six primary modes in documentary filmmaking: the poetic mode, the expository mode, the observational mode, the participatory mode, the reflexive mode and the performative mode. Nichols points out that: "Once established (...), modes overlap and intermingle. Individual films can be characterized by the mode that seems most influential to their organization, but individual films can also 'mix and match' modes as the occasion demands." (2001: 33)
3. For a detailed analysis of Macqueen's *The Last Peasants. Temptation*, see Colipcă Gabriela Iuliana (2010) "Migration and Romanian Identity in Angus Macqueen's *The Last Peasants. Temptation* (2003)", *Communication interculturelle et littérature*, no. 1 (9), January-February-March 2010, 74-80.
4. Probably to make more prominent the mythical time, the *illo tempore* conveying a sense of permanence to the representation of life in the village of Budeşti, Macqueen avoids being very specific about the historic time frame and does not explicitly indicate the years when Petru Damian and his family illegally migrated to France, when Petru reached Ireland or when Ion and his wife tried to follow their relatives' example and go West as illegal migrants as well. The viewers are challenged to make use of the subtle temporal references incorporated either in the narrator's voice-over or in the protagonists' interventions to discover when exactly the events in the documentary happened.
5. Angus Macqueen points out the differences in migrant-related policies in France and Britain, at least until 2002, in the following terms:

> [Romanian migrants] know they are not political asylum seekers, but in Britain are encouraged to ask for it. In France, they know that if they apply for asylum at the local police station they will either be arrested and deported on the spot, or simply chucked on to the streets. In Britain, they know jobs are easier to come by and the pay is better than in France, where employment laws are much stricter and attack the employer not the immigrant. Equally, they know that in France, without the right identity document, they can be picked up at any moment. (Macqueen 2003: 106)

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The Masquerade of Social Selves in *What Maisie Knew* by Henry James

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Abstract

The paper discusses the Social Self represented in the novel What Maisie Knew (1897) by Henry James. Its representation is analysed under the lens of his brother's (W. James) psychological theory outlined in The Principles of Psychology (1890). The concept of the Social Self in What Maisie Knew may be seen as taking shape in the images of five adults: a father and a mother, a stepfather and a stepmother and a governess. All the adults fail to fulfil their social roles as parents, apparently because their material and spiritual Selves are stronger than the social one. The representation of the Social Self in the novel is achieved via fixed focalization; the Social Selves of the (step)parents are presented from a little child's innocent, subjective point of view. The child becomes the eyes and the ears of the novel, that is, the reflector character through which the novel is narrated. Henry James almost never crosses the boundary and the radii of Maisie's perspective which is strictly kept throughout the entire narrative. It seems that through his novel H. James indirectly blames the English society where unhealthy ethics prosper and in which the devaluation of morality and ideals occurs.

Keywords: *Social Self, English society, motherhood, perspective, experience*

The Social Self of a person is formed due to the recognition of his personality by other people. William James, the American psychologist and philosopher, emphasizes that a person, in general, has several Social Selves. He insists that "a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry the image of him in their mind" (James 2006: 295). Moreover, according to W. James, a person's "*fame*, good or bad, and his honour or dishonour, are names for one of his social selves" (195). In James's opinion, one's Social Self has to come above one's Material Self because the opinion of others matters for the integration in society and therefore it influences one's self-esteem and self-assurance. James views the

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Social Self as a set of masks that a person changes to fit different environments. At the same time, the psychologist does not doubt the need for a unique set of social skills, because it creates the order of social life, giving relationships between people a sense of reliability and predictability.

In literature, the representation of the Social Self is a very interesting and broad topic because the novelists have the freedom of building their characters based on many Social Selves: mother, daughter, sister, neighbour, politician, doctor, etc. Novelists can write about as many Social Selves as they want, for there is a wide choice of social 'masks' in the real world to choose from and insert at the level of the fictional one. In his novels, Henry James represents the Social Self through the point of view and centre of consciousness techniques; the reader is given the opportunity to discover a person from many perspectives (social opinions). Moreover, H. James accentuates the role of the Social Self in the formation of experience of his characters.

The concept of the Social Self in the novel *What Maisie Knew* may be seen as taking shape in the images of five adults: Ida Farange, a mother and wife; Beale Farange, a father and husband; Miss Overmore/ Mrs. Beale, a young governess and stepmother; Sir Claude, a rich gentleman and stepfather, and Mrs. Wix, an old governess. Their images are projected in the eyes of a little girl; she is their only judge and jury. The author sticks to his choice of focalisation and the innocence of the little child makes it difficult to decipher the Selves of these adults; it is hard to promptly understand who is right and who is wrong, who is good and who is bad. In Maisie's eyes the 'lovely' young governess is so cute and nice and loving that she even marries Maisie's father to be closer to the child. Her father is so handsome and gorgeous but because of his 'problems' has to depart for America for ever and to leave Maisie behind, with her "brute of a mother" (James 1996*:* 146). Her mother too, even if she treats Maisie awfully, always tells her how much she loves her; in the end she has to abandon her too, because of 'severe' health problems and she announces her stepfather as Maisie's protector and tutor. Maisie is fine with Sir Claude because she likes him enormously; and because she likes her stepmother, too, she 'brings them together' so the trio can live happily ever after. The fun is spoiled by the old governess, though, who has to remind them of the 'moral sense' and decent behaviour. Mrs. Wix, the old, ugly lady is the one

who in the end unties the shameful bond and 'saves' Maisie from the sinful peril. This is all that Maisie 'knows'; reality, however, is different.

One's life begins from one's family; the family is behind the formation of the person as a human and as a citizen. When one becomes a husband, a wife or a parent, one assumes certain responsibilities. The family is the source of love, respect, solidarity and affection; it is something any civilized society is built on, without which a person cannot happily exist. Creating a family is a great feat. The hardest task is, though, not to give birth, but rather to plant into the child's consciousness the concepts of love, freedom, faith, conscience, and responsibility.

What Maisie Knew is a novel that does not teach family values directly; they are concealed from the reader. It is more of a novel that shows the abominable consequences of when a family collapses because of the lack of moral and family virtues. The novel is narrated from the viewpoint of the child, Maisie Farange, who witnesses her parents' divorce and remarriage. Ida and Beale Farange form a couple who has failed in their social roles as husband and wife, and what is worse, as mother and father. The couple constantly argues, quarrels and disputes about almost everything. The divorce does not put an end to their discord, on the contrary, "[t]he mother had wished to prevent the father from, as she said, 'so much as looking' at the child; the father's plea was that the mother's lightest touch was 'simply contamination'" (1996: 15). After their divorce, Maisie has been granted a new role, "she was the little feathered shuttlecock they could fiercely keep flying between them" (22). It seems that H. James blames the society where unhealthy ethics prosper and in which the devaluation of morality and ideals occurs:

> This was a society in which for the most part people were occupied only with chatter, but the disunited couple had at last grounds for expecting a time of high activity. They girded their loins, they felt as if the quarrel had only begun. They felt indeed more married than ever, inasmuch as what marriage had mainly suggested to them was the unbroken opportunity to quarrel. There had been 'sides' before, and there were sides as much as ever […] The many friends of the Faranges drew together to differ about them; contradiction grew young again over teacups and cigars. Everybody was always assuring everybody of something very shocking, and nobody would have been jolly if nobody had been outrageous (15).

Maisie has to learn how to survive in a world of preoccupied and oblivious adults. She learns from her mother the art of negligence and of producing "the impression of having mysteries in her life" (James 1996: 36). Ida's Social Self as mother has a very insignificant place in the hierarchy of her Selves; it is surpassed by her primitive bodily and material search. It is really painful to read the passages where Maisie acknowledges her mother's attitude towards herself. Every child wants to be the centre of the universe for his/her parents; Maisie does not want so much, she only desires everyone around her to be happy. But Ida punishes everybody when she is angry, her daughter included, and so, once Maisie returns home from her father's, her mother refuses to see the little girl; it takes her "three days during which Sir Claude [has] made hasty merry dashes into the schoolroom to smooth down the odd situation and to comfort the little girl by saying: 'She'll come around, you know'" (61). Her governess, Mrs. Wix has also tried to do her best by keeping the girl busy with school subjects and long conversations in order to not feel the absence of her mother. Such a behaviour was not unusual, Ida's "duty took at times the form of not seeing her child for days" (64) and unfortunately, it all ended with Maisie accepting with ease that "Mamma doesn't care for [her]" (73).

Her stepfather, Sir Claude, on the other hand, is carrying his social role with dignity and affection; he spends a lot of time with Maisie and offers her all his love and attention. Even the cruel words that Ida calls him (an awful fraud and an idle beast, and a sorry dunce) do not stick to Sir Claude's Social Self in Maisie's mind; besides he has "never said a word to her against her mother" (1996: 77). He could be called an exemplary stepfather if it was not for the interference of the stepmother and her former governess. Everything thus seems very complicated for the young girl, as she knows:

> that her stepmother had been making attempts to see her, that her mother had deeply resented it, that her stepfather had backed her stepmother up, that the latter had pretended to be acting as the representative of her father, and that her mother took the whole thing, in plain terms, very hard (67).

Mrs. Wix is the one who takes the situation in her hands and acts more like a mother and a father taken together. She is the only person who does not ask Maisie to 'bring anyone together' or to help to keep any secrets; the

governess just wants what is best for Maisie and the girl to become a good person (71).

The representation of her father's Social Self appears to be less favourable for his image, him being constantly slandered by Ida, his former wife. Beale Farange, in his turn, is working on spoiling hers, and even teaches the child to repeat his terrible messages to her mamma, which Maisie obediently transmits: "He said I was to tell you from him […] that you're a nasty horrid pig" (21). Moreover, he does not let Maisie keep the correspondence with her mother and welcomes a lot of male friends who negatively influence the consciousness of the little girl. These gentlemen smoke cigarettes in front of her face and some of them have even "made her strike matches and light their cigarettes; others, holding her on knees [have] violently jolted, pinched the calves of her legs till she shrieked – her shriek [has been] much admired – and reproached them with being toothpicks" (19). He soon remarries and Maisie's first governess, Miss Overmore, turns into her stepmother (Mrs. Beale).

Maisie is fond of her new "little mother", who is very beautiful, elegant, clever and well-mannered (James 1996: 50). For the little girl, this woman is a paragon of beauty and perfection. But the reader sees that this is Miss Overmore, who influences Maisie's opinion about everything throughout the novel. It is Miss Overmore who has "sown the seeds of secrecy; sown them not by anything she said, but by a mere roll of those fine eyes which Maisie [has] already admired" (23). Moreover, it is Miss Overmore who is constantly lowering Maisie's self-esteem and detracting her mother, only she does so in such a manner that poor Maisie does not understand her real intentions. For example, when she abandons her place as a governess in Ida Farange's house and goes to work for Maisie's father, she explains this quite simply: she adores the little girl and does not want to give her up and this is why she decides to make this "sacrifice" and break "her vow to Mrs. Farange" (28). Miss Overmore's pretended generosity and affection do not match reality, and this contrast flows into the subsequent dramatic irony. Maisie thinks that she understands "what this martyr [has] gone through" and she realises that she likes her so much, "better than she like[s] papa"; moreover, in her eyes, "papa too like[s] Miss Overmore exactly as much" (28). Besides, Mrs. Beale obtrudes her opinion on Maisie, creating negative images about other people in Maisie's mind. She tells Maisie striking things about her mother: "She has other people

than poor little *you* to think about, and has gone abroad with them; so you needn't be in the least afraid she'll stickle this time for her rights" (40); or assures Maisie that the man who lives with her mother is "ignorant and bad" (41). Even if Maisie feels something odd about her stepmother, she does not care about Miss Overmore / Mrs. Beale's bad reputation, and when Mrs. Wix tries to convince the girl that Mrs. Beale cannot be trusted, Maisie's reply proves a childish behaviour: "She's beautiful and I love her! I love her and she's beautiful!" (212). Mrs. Beale's lovely Social Self is just a mask which she wears for as long as she needs it, but when Maisie chooses Mrs. Wix over her she lashes at Maisie and calls her all sorts of cruel names: "abominable little horror"; "hideous little hypocrite" (272).

The reality is that Ida Farange does indeed have spots on her Social Self, as Mrs. Beale claims, but it is not the best decision to tell her little daughter these things. As mentioned earlier, Ida falls short of what is expected of a lady and a wife. Her innumerable lovers are not a secret to anyone by the end of the novel. It is for one of them that she forsakes Maisie, and the girl remains with her stepfather and Mrs. Wix. It is obvious that Maisie is confused and somewhat afraid throughout. She is told that mamma and papa have problems because of her and she, therefore, does her best to keep up with her social role as a daughter; poor Maisie has "the sense of a double office and enlarged play for pacific powers" (196).

The Social Selves Maisie carries in her mind are so many; she feels that with every person separately she has to become somebody else and to act according to the situation in order to satisfy everybody. Only when she is alone on the first day of their arrival in France can one see how happy and free the little girl is because she does not have to pretend to be anyone now; Maisie feels redeemed "for all the years of her tendency to produce socially that impression of an excess of the queer something which had seemed to waver so widely between innocence and guilt" (180). It is the moment when the necessity in her Social Self vanishes and she can be herself without restrictions, she can feel herself "attuned to everything and [lay] her hand, right and left", she can talk, laugh, play, and enjoy the careless life of a child (180).

Apparently, the Social Selves represented in the novel *What Maisie Knew* are the images of that part of society which Henry James despised the most: the vulgar, the superficial English society. And in order not to spoil the innocent child, he offers her the possibility of choice. From all the adults

around her, Maisie picks the old Mrs. Wix, the old governess who has "no money, no clothes, no appearance, no anything" (203) but the one who regardless her unpleasant appearance has a kind heart and a moral consciousness. Through Maisie, Henry James teaches the lesson of real beauty, that which lies hidden within, not that on show, for everyone to see. In this manner, like his brother, W. James, he reinforces the notion that one's Social Self is situated somewhere above the Material and below the Spiritual one.

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As if by Magical Realism: A Refugee Crisis in Fiction

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Abstract

Mohsin Hamid is, along with Salman Rushdie, one of the most powerful 'postcolonial voices' in British literature to employ elements of magical realism in order to fictionally recreate a hectic contemporary history which seems to be moving faster than ever. People desperately flee from violent civil wars, seeking refuge, and politics of inclusion flourishes in Europe in response. Against this background, drawing inspiration from various violent events, like the Syrian Civil War, the fall of Mosul and the Yemeni Civil War, as well as from his personal migrant experience, Hamid publishes his fourth novel, Exit West, *equally personal and political as his other novels, most notably,* The Reluctant Fundamentalist, *dedicated to the events of 9/11. The paper aims to analyse* Exit West *from the perspective of this relation between the personal and the political, tracing the role of magical realism in opening the doors towards the painfully realistic construction of otherness.*

Keywords: *Mohsin Hamid, refugees, otherness, politics, migration*

Introduction

Mention should be made from the beginning that the title of the present paper has been slightly amended since the submission of the proposal. The initial subtitle ('The Syrian Refugee Crisis in Fiction') rather hastily addressed a precisely determined event or phenomenon – the crisis which began in 2011-2012 and made itself felt in Europe through the pressure of more than one million refugees and migrants in 2015.

The assumption, that the novel henceforth discussed fictionally represents this historical moment that polarized the European Union and, most probably, had an impact on the Brexit vote, is not necessarily invalidated by subsequent research. However, nor is it fully validated. Other historical events can also represent credible sources of inspiration for

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it, the battle of Mosul (Iraq) and the Yemenite Civil War coming immediately to mind. Whatever the truth, the aim of this paper is to discuss fiction, and not historical *realities* of the twenty-first century. However, as defined in the 1970s, in full bloom of the postmodern reassessment of the so-called grand metanarratives, the historical work is narrative discourse as much as any other body of texts that are heard, reported, informed by ideology and that impose a reading and an interpretative strategy (White, 1973).

In a previous research on the narratives of 9/11, I strived to make a point on the fictionalism of history, on its deceitful, totalizing and manipulative nature, which is actually a contestation of the phrase *historical reality*. Literature, in its turn, can also be history by other means, but it is deceiving by definition. Therefore, starting from these two premises, that history is fictionalized/ fictionalizing, while fiction may touch upon historicity, one reaches back to the overused concept of Lyotard - that of the "incredulity towards metanarratives" (1984).

What is more, the literary piece under the lens here, a novel shortlisted for the prestigious Man Booker Prize in 2017, entitled *Exit West* and written by Mohsin Hamid, has little to do with realism or historical fiction, as currently understood by literary criticism. One should not even attempt to frame it in any category of *grand recits*, if not for other reasons, at least in order to avoid a virtual rebuttal from its very 'alive' author, who has constantly made use of his authority, explaining 'what the author wanted to say' in numerous public speeches and interviews. And since he has not mentioned the Syrian crisis once and has repeatedly claimed that his novel may be representative for any present or future migrant crisis of such amplitude, it might be better to reconsider the title, dropping the modifier 'Syrian', thus imprinting a more general and less totalizing tone to it.

Having said, in so many words, that the assumption that Hamid was put on the track of writing about refugees by the incidence of this particular piece of news in the international media at the time he was working on his fourth novel might have been slightly misled, one had better stick to the proverbial pinch of salt when it comes to his statements and explanations, because of his much discussed appetence for unreliability, which, as the following section will try to demonstrate, characterizes all his novels.

A migrant through the world, a migrant through fictional forms

Born in Pakistan, having lived in the U.S. where he also completed his studies at Princeton University, under the guidance of Joyce Carol Oates and Toni Morrison, whom he acknowledges as influential for his career as a novelist, and then at Harvard School of Law, Mohsin Hamid moved to London in 2001 and became a British citizen in 2006. It is here that he started gaining world recognition as one of the most important young novelists of the 21st century. However, one should not consider him merely a British author; that would be akin to an imperialistic cultural appropriation that today's cultural politics deems unacceptable, and that would disregard his multiculturalism as both a person and a writer of fiction. In 2009, he seemed to close the circle by moving back to Pakistan with his family, but not even he can tell that his migrant experience ended there. Owing to his American and British cultural and educational 'adstrata', neither could Hamid be simply labelled as a `Pakistani novelist'. Describing himself as a 'mongrel' who has travelled the world since early childhood, having called 'home' three capitals situated at immense distance one from the other, namely Lahore, New York and London, Hamid has a 'record' quite similar to that of another 'British' novelist that modern criticism labels a 'postcolonial voice', namely Salman Rushdie. Nonetheless, probably less interested in a postcolonial revenge on the English language such as Rushdie's `chutnification' (see *Midnight's Children*), Hamid never misses an opportunity to assert his hybridity, which, to him, ends up outlining a literary credo, which he shares in the Introduction to his *Freudian-in-reverse*-titled collection of essays on life, art and politics, *Discontent and Its Civilisations:*

> Mongrel. Miscegenator. Half-breed. Outcast. […] Our words for hybridity are so often epithets. They shouldn't be. Hybridity needs not be the problem. It could be the solution. Hybrids do more than embody mixtures between groups. Hybrids reveal the boundaries between groups to be false. And this is vital, for creativity comes from intermingling, from rejecting the lifelessness of purity (Hamid, 2014: xvii).

If Rushdie's *Imaginary Homelands* comes to someone's mind at this point, one is not wrong. "For every text, a context" says the latter (1992: 92). Hamid's context is marked by turmoil: "I have lived in Pakistan during its recent and most intense period of terrorist activity and drone strikes, in

London during the years on either side of the 2005 public transport bombings, and in New York in the era that came to an end with the attacks on the World Trade Center of 2001" (Hamid 2014: xv). Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that his texts are political and, given his much brandished hybridity – which he derogatorily calls mongrelness to make a point -, that they are equally personal, with a strong autobiographical vein. Not only is the personal political for second-wave feminism, here is how the personal turns political for any aware citizen of the twenty-first century global village.

Hypothetically, if one took upon oneself the endeavour of critically assessing Hamid's complete works in the form of a monograph, one would be in a predicament in what acquiring certain uniformity is concerned, should one fail to bring this nullified antonymy between the private and the public to the fore. It is one of the threads that run through all his four novels published up to date: *Moth Smoke* (2000), *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013) and *Exit West* (2017). A brief description of each novel might be helpful in demonstrating that Mohsin Hamid's novels are hybrid works themselves, owing to their preference for a chronotope that reads *'Pakistan, present day'*, to the multiplicity of textual forms of western inspiration, and to the use of English worthy of a Princeton graduate with a major in literature uninterested in linguistic `cross-pollination'. This supports Peter Morey's assessment of Hamid's fiction as "deterritorialising, that is, beyond the totalising categories of East and West" (2011: 138) and, therefore, representative for contemporary *Weltliteratur*.

Moth Smoke (2000), Hamid's highly acclaimed debut, which he started as part of a creative writing assignment given by Toni Morrison during his university years, is set against the backdrop of late 1990s, when nuclear tests were run in Pakistan. It employs a multitude of narrative techniques – a framing narrative of historical inspiration, alluding to the fratricide conflict between India and Pakistan, multiple focalization, embedded interviews, long soliloquies and digressions, etc. – to tell an allegorical story of the downfall of an 'everyman', in the context of "a world taken over by gun-running, drug-trafficking, large-scale industrialism, commercial entrepreneurship, tourism, new money, nightclubs, boutiques, politicians and civil servants noted for greed and corruption, and the constant threat of an explosion—of population, of

crime, of the nuclear bomb, some kind of terrible explosion" (Desai, *The New York Review of Books*, 2000). Compared by Jhumpa Lahiri to Fitzgerald (in *The Great Gatsby*), Hamid succeeds in providing his readership with a very *American* novel about the social and political state of Pakistan:

> Like Fitzgerald, Hamid writes about the slippery ties between the extremely wealthy and those who hover, and generally stumble, in money's glare. Hamid also sets the action over a single, degenerate summer, when passions run high and moral lassitude prevails. And like Fitzgerald, Hamid probes the vulgarity and violence that lurk beneath a surface of affluence and ease (Lahiri in *The New York Times*, 2000).

The Reluctant Fundamentalist (2007), arguably Hamid's literary breakthrough, which brought him on the Man Booker Prize shortlist and in the spotlights of the literary world, selling over one million copies, being translated into 25 languages and transposed into a fairly appreciated film, does away with polyphony and unwinds as a dramatic monologue inspired by Camus's *The Fall*. Literally turning off America, in a postcolonial manner, by silencing an unnamed American narratee, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* may be read as the story of every law-abiding, American-dream pursuer of Muslim origins during the years of hysterical Islamophobia following the attacks on the World Trade Center.

Hamid's third novel, *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013) comes with yet another narrative form – a satirical mock-Bildungsroman sprawled along almost 80 years, which deals with "well… how to get filthy rich in rising Asia", as its author cares to 'elaborate' in all his lectures on his works. A constant in Hamid's fiction is the sparse use of names – for identity-related purposes in some cases, for refusing the characters a voice, in others. This time, the reader does not find out the name of the protagonist, who is addressed throughout the novel only as "you". Americanism is again at work: the entire novel is constructed as a self-book, in the vein of Dale Carnegie's famous *How to Win Friends and Influence People* and is, as novelist Keith Garebian remarks in his review, "an audacious challenge to the genre of realistic fiction because the narrator speaks in the fashion of a motivational speaker" (2013). Once again, choosing Asia as background, Hamid parodies the American way and critiques its cultural imperialism/neocolonialism in a very… American way.

Therefore, the first three novels by Mohsin Hamid are, formally, a polyphonic allegory, a dramatic monologue and, respectively, a motivational book - fictional forms as divergent as possible from the conventions of realism and genuine wanderings on the path of literary experimentation. And yet, they all are realistic representations of the world nowadays, of the social, economic and political effects of globalization. The fourth, *Exit West* (2017), is published at a time when the world has just witnessed massive relocations of people from Asian zones of conflict to Europe, dividing the European society and, what is more, the European states, into liberals willing to welcome and help the refugees and adepts of a new form of far-right extremism, who only want the 'invaders' of their cities gone. Once again, Hamid deals, in his fiction, with phenomena of utmost importance on the world stage, and once again he resorts to indirectness to do so: *Exit West* is poetic prose with elements of magical realism.

All the world's a refuge and all the men and women merely migrants

Although only nearly two decades have passed in the twenty-first century, history seems to be moving faster than it used to. The political events precipitate, technological advancement is difficult to keep up with, borders are erased or redrawn, refugees flood Europe and politics of inclusion flourishes, while America is building a wall to keep immigration at bay. France, and by extension, Europe "has to learn to live with terrorism," as French Prime-Minister, Manuel Valls, says (Euronews 2016). British media (and not only) is engaged in a race of framing migrants. The structure of the EU is redefined after Brexit. Much of these political phenomena is closely connected to the most recent wave of migration, with people's fleeing from war- and terror-ridden territories in a desperate attempt to save what is left of their lives, both physically and psychologically. This is, in a nutshell, a significant part of the history of the last decade, and this is also the historical background of Mohsin Hamid's latest novel, *Exit West*. But does this make *Exit West* a historical novel? Yes and no. In the classical sense of the term, it does not. The spatial and temporal coordinates are undetermined, heroes are missing, antagonistic forces are barely mentioned, and even the conflict that triggers the déroulement of the plot is somewhere in the background, the novel

foregrounding a love story of two unexceptional characters. The entire scaffolding of the novel "break(s) with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable" (Derrida 1977: 185 qtd. in Hutcheon 1989: 7).

Therefore, Hamid's fictional work challenges "the (related) conventional forms of fiction and history through its acknowledgment of their inescapable textuality" (Hutcheon 1989: 11) and through the multiplicity of potential contexts. The absence of the elements that could make up a historical novel and the presence of some very topical 'intertexts of the world' embedded in the narrative, especially in the second half of the novel, when the space turns from indeterminate to precisely mapped, may justify the inclusion of *Exit West* in the fuzzy category of historiographic metafiction, even without an overt signalling of the *meta-* dimension. The only immutable context is announced by the title itself. It calls to mind a disco-pop hit of the last century, 'Go West', composed in the 1970s by Village People, but made famous in the early 1990s by Pet Shop Boys, whose title was inspired by a 19th-century call to the colonization of the (American) West. 'Go' has now become 'Exit' because of the border-crossing constraints (in the world of the real, because in the fictional world all borders are made to disappear, as if by magic.). One could no longer go wherever one wants to go – one needs to *escape* through Narnia-esque doors. This 'wherever' is always to the west – symptomatic in this respect is the observation made in the novel that the exits to west are guarded by heavily armed men and the passing is paid for with large sums of money, while the corresponding doors on the other side are freely accessible to everyone, but no one wants to pass through them, for fear that they might end up in an East tormented by civil wars, terrorism, famine, economic or environmental disasters. This is not to say that Hamid reconstructs the East/West dichotomy by representing the former as a dystopian hell on earth, and the latter as a utopian land of honey and milk, with a limbo placed somewhere on a Greek island. This would be unrealistic, and - although obliquely and non-compliantly with the tenets of realist fiction - Hamid's novel "stretches the boundaries of the real just enough to make a point about the state of immigrants and refugees in the contemporary world – but it's very much grounded in reality" (Michael Chabon's blurb in the Penguin edition of *Exit West*).

Among a few very short vignettes which carry the reader to Sydney, Tokyo, Vienna, Amsterdam and Marrakesh just to suggest "that the whole planet was on the move" (Hamid 2017, 167), too underdeveloped, however, to give the novel a polyphonic quality, a love story starts weaving "in a city swollen by refugees but mostly at peace, or at least not yet openly at war" (1). That "not yet" in the first sentence of the novel is, of course, proleptic, and Saeed and Nadia, the only characters that are given a name, will soon be surrounded by the atrocities of a violent civil war, in their unnamed city *where death has [his] dominion*[1]. The language employed in representing the world turned to chaos is disturbingly lyrical at times, and run-on sentences frequently render the characters' thoughts in free indirect discourse.

> But part of her still resisted the idea of moving in with him, with anyone for that matter, having at such great difficulty moved out in the first place, and become quite attached to her small flat, to the life, albeit lonely, that she had built there, and also finding the idea of living as a chaste half lover, half-sister to Saeed in close proximity to his parents rather bizarre, and she might have waited much longer had Saeed's mother not been killed, a stray heavy-calibre round passing through the windscreen of her family's car and taking with it a quarter of Saeed's mother's head, not while she was driving, for she had not driven in months, but while she was checking inside for an earring she thought she had misplaced, and Nadia, seeing the state Saeed and Saeed's father were in when Nadia came to their apartment for the first time, on the day of the funeral, stayed with them that night to offer what comfort and help she could and did not spend another night in her own apartment again (72).

All the while, the external narrator plays the objective, busily imparting telegraphic reports on military assaults, commencement of curfew, and suspension of any means of electronic communication, and thus convincingly constructing the image of a world in ruins.

Toying a little bit with the Western readers' expectations, Hamid makes this war history the 'her story' of a young professional Muslim woman who does not pray, smokes weed and takes hallucinogenic mushrooms, drives a motorcycle, lives alone and engages in sexual relationships outside wedlock, wearing a black robe and veil "so men don't fuck with [her]" (16), and the 'his-story' of a young professional Muslim man who does pray, lives with his parents, as he ought to, and rejects (if

only up to a certain point) the woman's sexual advances. Against the tragic background of a city at war, nothing is genuinely tragic in Nadia and Saeed's relationship, just as nothing is tragic in their ulterior separation caused by the estrangement accumulated during the years of their hopping from one place to another, or in their casual reencounter in an epilogue set half a century later. Of course, the trauma of seeing their relatives "blown […] to bits, literally to bits, the largest of which […] were a head and two-thirds of an arm" (29) is what triggers their departure/ quest for survival, at the expense of leaving the beloved behind, which is perceived as murderous: "when we migrate, we murder from our lives those we leave behind" (94). In Hamid's case, the migrant's trauma has actual autobiographical roots, as he declares: "I have been migrating my whole life, so, in a way, I suppose I was always going to write at some point a novel about migration. So the experience of migration and the emotional pain and confusion that comes from it, I think, do in a way come from me" (PBS News Hour 2018).

The innovation of resorting to magical realism in *Exit West* is justified by its author during the same Q&A session on PBS as having been inspired by the magic of technology. As mentioned above, the passageways to the West are black rectangles appearing in places where regular doors used to be, which transport migrants to various places on earth in a matter of seconds. Hamid starts from the obliteration of geographical distances – at the mental level, for now – by the use of the smartphone.

> So, right now, most of us have a little black rectangle in our pocket […]. And when we look at it, our consciousness goes far, far away from our bodies, like magically appearing somewhere else, looking at your phone, and suddenly you're reading about the moon or Mars or Antarctica" (PBS News Hour 2018).

He claims that he has thought of a technological advancement that would allow the body to move as fast as the mind. Plausible as this explanation may be, contemporary authors who too readily explain all their narrative choices had better be mistrusted. The more they speak, the less they say, and the more they may throw their readers on a wrong track. It may not be the case with Hamid, but this literary device of his resembles "the foreshortening of history so that the time scheme of the novel metaphorically contains the long process of colonization and its aftermath"

(Slemon 1988: 12). Of course, the colonization Slemon mentions in his seminal chapter 'Magic Realism as Post-colonial Discourse' is that which affected the areas from Asia and Africa under the rule of the European powers. Hamid's is a reversed colonization targeting the West, overpopulated with migrants from all over the world in a matter of days. In employing this oxymoronic strategy "that suggests a binary opposition between the representational code of realism and that, roughly, of fantasy" (Slemon, 1988: 10), Hamid may conceal another attempt at 'writing back'[2] after the silencing of America in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

Since Nadia has long lost the connection with her family because of her lifestyle, unusual for a Muslim woman, the only family she and Saeed leave behind is Saeed's father, who is unwilling to abandon the town where his wife rests. The passage is imagined as a violent death followed by immediate rebirth – "Nadia experienced a kind of extinguishing as she entered the blackness and a gasping struggle as fought to exit it, and she felt cold and bruised and damp as she lay on the floor of the room at the other side, trembling and too spent at first to stand" (Hamid 2017: 98). The exit point, where "everyone was foreign and so, in a sense, no one was" (100), is the Greek island Mykonos, "a great draw for tourists in the summer, and, it seemed, a great draw for migrants this winter" (101). Surely Hamid has made this choice inspired by the huge influx of Syrian refugees. At that time, *The Spectator* read:

> Since the beginning of the year, about 100,000 migrants have arrived via Turkey […] A Brussels bureaucrat by the name of Vincent Cochetel […] has criticised Greece for not doing enough. 'Wake up and do more,' said the bureaucrat […]. But how can an island of 35,000 inhabitants take in 40,000 refugees and provide for them? (2015 online).

Hamid's version of Mykonos is a transit area, where thousands of refugees live in tents, in a camp, outside the city, and trade for water, blankets and access to electricity, to charge their phones, while robbing others or guarding themselves against being robbed. The tableau created is a realistic literary representation of the hard times endured by refugees, calling to mind disturbing images of their wretched existence, broadcast by European televisions in the summer of 2015.

With the help of a local volunteer whom Nadia befriends, the two protagonists reach the second door, which sends them to a city of London

that is not realistically represented as it is at present, but as it might be in the near future. It is here that Hamid critiques Western 'nativism', all the while maintaining a balanced, understanding tone:

> "I can understand it, she said. "Imagine if you lived here. And millions of people from all over the world suddenly arrived."
> "Millions arrived in our country," Saeed replied. "When there were wars nearby."
> "That was different. Our country was poor. We didn't feel we had as much to lose." (Hamid 2017: 162)

Originally understood as promoting the interests of native inhabitants over those of immigrants, nativist policy has a long history. The term was coined around mid-19th century, in the U.S., the 'natives' being the descendants of the Thirteen Colonies, who feared the proliferation of Catholicism through the numerous Irish migrants coming to the States in the 1830s. At present, not only does nativism manifest in the U.S. – although Donald Trump assumes it as state policy – but also in Europe and, most poignantly, in the U.K., as a reaction against the migrants arrived from Central and Eastern Europe owing to their right to free circulation within the EU borders, or those from the former 'jewel(s) in the crown of the British Empire' from Asia and Africa and, lastly, against the quota of asylum seekers that the European Commission imposed on the EU countries. The Brexit vote and the recrudescence of far-right ideologies are real consequences whose effects Hamid chooses to augment, constructing a dystopian London occupied by migrants coming through the magical doors:

> All over London, houses and parks and disused lots were being peopled in this way, some said by a million migrants, some said by twice as that. It seemed the more empty a space in the city the more it attracted squatters, with unoccupied mansions in the borough of Kensington and Chelsea particularly hard-hit, their absentee owners often discovering the bad news too late to intervene, and similarly the great expenses of Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens, filling up with tents and rough shelters, such that it was now said that between Westminster and Hammersmith legal residents were a minority, and native-born ones vanishingly few, with local newspapers referring to the area as the worst of the black holes in the fabric of the nation (126).

This invasion is soon responded with a massive operation "to reclaim Britain for Britain" (132) and by the organisation of the nativist extremists with the tacit support of the authorities. "The social media chatter was of a coming night of shattered glass" (132) and, as is often the case, the social media is eventually proven right and/or it is the social media that triggers further developments. In *Exit West*, the development is the transformation of London in a war area: "around this zone were soldiers and armoured vehicles, and above it were drones and helicopters, and inside it were Nadia and Saeed, who had run from war already, and did not know where next to run" (135). Authorities cut off electricity in the occupied area, leaving the migrants in darkness, which occasions a poetic division between 'dark London' and 'light London', the latter, with its elegant restaurants and black cabs, and the former with fights, murders, rapes and assaults, blamed on nativist provocateurs or on other migrants. The hell on earth which the two characters escaped has relocated to London. But the conflict, although fuelled by the street and by the media with rumours of unconfirmed massacres, ends rather inexplicably, and the migrants are sent to work camps where they should build their own dwellings. For no apparent reason, however, Saeed and Nadia decide at some point "to give up their position on the housing list, and all they had built here" (189) and step for the third time through a magical door, this time heading to Marin, California, a small city near San Francisco. An evocation of a never-fulfilled American Dream or, perhaps, a re-enactment of the colonization of California, this final segment brings about the long-sought calm in the lives of the two, and, with it, their growing apart and eventual separation, as if their *love in this time of cholera*[3] had only had the purpose of keeping them together for mutual support.

Closing remarks

"We are all migrants through time," says the narrator of *Exit West* (209), that is to say that the world around us changes whether we move through space or not, and that we need to constantly adjust to change. In today's world, migration, a phenomenon as old as human civilisation, appears to lead to the redefinition of borders as we have known them since the formation of national states. It is probably in this key that Mohsin Hamid's latest opus should be read, after all – as a contribution, with the tools

writers of fiction have at their disposal, not to the identification of a solution to a world crisis, but to a new understanding and acceptance of the Other.

Notes

1. Allusion to Dylan Thomas's poem, *And Death Shall Have No Dominion* (1936).
2. Allusion to the book *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, ed. by Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin and Gareth Griffiths, Routledge, 1989.
3. Reference is made to Garcia Marquez's novel *Love in the Time of the Cholera*. In Spanish, not only is the term *cólera* denotative of the infectious disease, but it also signifies rage, wrath.

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Tropes of Ireland in the Gendered Mirror

Ioana MOHOR-IVAN*

Abstract

The paper discusses the connections between gender, colonialism and nationalism by focussing on the "woman-nation" pairing that has characterised both the colonial and countercolonial modes of representing Ireland. One strand of the argument focuses on English allegorical representations of the colonised land as a frail but docile Hibernia, protected by the English law and order, which is a favourite trope of the 19th-century British periodic press and its iconographic texts. In opposition, the Irish native tradition (exemplified by the early 18th-century aislinge of Aogán Ó Rathaille and by the political ballads of the late 18th- and 19th-centuries) revert to either the image of "a vulnerable virgin ravished by the masculine aggressive invader from England" or that of "a mother goddess summoning her faithful sons to rise up against the infidel invader" (Kearney 1984: 21). Blending the two, Yeats's Cathleen Ni Houlihan constitutes itself into a mythic nexus for personifications of Ireland, becoming a potent symbol of Irish nationalism. A final part of the argument considers the 'afterlives' of such feminine national icons, which "while seeming to empower women, actually displace them outside history into the realm of myth." (Fleming 1999: 48) Maud Gonne's play Dawn and Eavan Boland's poem "Mise Eire" offer examples of women's rewritings of patriarchal modes of representation which question and reformulate the "woman-nation" trope.

Key words: *identity, gender, colonialism, nationalism, representation, "woman-nation"*

Defined as "the distinctive character belonging to any given individual, or shared by all members of a particular social category or group" (Rummens 1993: 157), the term identity implies a self-conscious process of affiliation to a group, on various criteria that can range from gender, age or class to ethnicity, religion, language and territorial allegiance. The identification with and alleged acceptance into a group that has a shared system of symbols and meanings as well as norms for conduct (Collier & Thomas 1988: 101-2) can be described as cultural identity, a concept that reflects the group's development of a defining cultural system, which, according to

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Hofstede (1994) is made up of symbols (verbal and non-verbal language), rituals (collective activities essential to a given society), values (collective assumptions underlying moral or aesthetic categorizations into good or bad, beautiful or ugly, normal or abnormal) and heroes (the real or imaginary people who serve as behavioural patterns for the members of a cultural group.)

Nevertheless, as Julia Wright notes in her "Introduction" to the two-volume *Companion to Irish Literature* published in 2010, "identity questions are also discernible in a recurring concern with gender and sexuality" (6), which is characteristic for colonial (as well as post-colonial) writings. On the one hand, this can be explained through the translation of the colonial binary model of thought (predicated upon the basic opposition established between self and other) in the gendered construction of the colonial project metaphorically identified with the attempt "of the male colonizer to subdue and penetrate the female territory of the colonized people" (Flynn 2000). In response to this colonial feminization, the colonized have attempted to "produce a reverse discourse of over-determined masculinity" (Flemming 1999: 41), in which the land becomes a "mother forced into penury by foreign invaders" (Flynn 2000), requiring her sons to fight the oppressors in order to restore her former grandeur and possessions. Tough placed in the paradoxical position of being at once Western and a colony, Ireland has not escaped being culturally cast as "other" and "female" in both colonial and counter-colonial contexts (also see Mohor-Ivan 2014: 150-69).

Since at least the 17th century, a major Anglophone strand of representations for Ireland has typically figured it within the frame of ideals of the domestic feminine (Flemming 1999: 41), a tendency that intensified during the 19th century, under the influence of Matthew Arnold's seminal collection of lectures entitled *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867), in which the English poet and cultural critic advanced a construction of the Celt as sensible, exalted and thus "peculiarly disposed to feel the spell of the feminine idiosyncrasy" (Cairns & Richards 1988: 48). As L.P. Curtis has demonstrated in his study of anti-Irish prejudice in Victorian England, suggestively named *Anglo-Saxons and Celts* (1968), one political entailment of stereotyping the Irish in terms of typically feminine attributes like emotion, irrationality, and lack of self-reliance was that "the self-consciously mature and virile Anglo-Saxon had no intention of

conferring his sophisticated institutions upon the child-like and feminine Irish Celt" (Curtis 1968: 62)

One locus where the multiple and overlapping strands of thoughts on Ireland and Irishness achieves full visibility is the 19th century periodical press, because, as Michael de Nie asserts in the introduction to his study on *The Eternal Paddy: Irish Identity and the British Press. 1798-1882*:

> Throughout the nineteenth century, British reporting on Ireland was informed by the enduring stereotypes that constituted Irish identity. "Paddy", the objectified Irishman, was discursively constructed in leading articles, editorial cartoons and letters to the editor, using a number of different elements. The most important components in this manufacture were stereotypes of race, religion and class. Rooted in traditional anti-Irish prejudices, these stereotypes were all revived and reaffirmed for the press by episodes of violence or distress in nineteenth-century Ireland. British conceptions of Ireland, the Irish and themselves were thus always the product of both timeworn stereotypes and contemporary crisis and concerns. (2004: 4-5)

Though Anthony Wohl draws our attention to the fact that "it is of course both dangerous and simplistic to analyse the complexities of an enormously complex age through the lens of just one journal" [2012], the above-stated can be demonstrated by turning to the iconographic productions of the period, such as exemplified by the cartoons appearing in the *Punch.* As the most popular comic journal of the period, the *Punch* can thus stand as an index of popular English conceptions on the Irish question. In addition, in a "hierarchic and race conscious age", many of its cartoons "reflected, and so perhaps strengthened and sustained, Victorian prejudices and the propensity to stereotype and to think stereotypically" (Wohl 2012).

The cartoons published in the *Punch* are thus illustrative of "the new scientific racism which developed in Britain over the course of the nineteenth-century", which combined "popular ideas of difference and long-held stereotypes" (de Nie 2004: 6) to assign a second-order, or sub-human status to the Irish. In addition, they are a reflection of the gendered interplay between "masculine power and feminine virtue under colonial domination" (Wright 2010: 6). As figure 1 illustrates, famous cartoonists of the time would lean on the theme of Beauty (Hibernia or Ernia, representing Ireland) being saved from the clutches of the Best (Fenianism) by a figure representing law and order, sometimes appearing as the stern

Athens (Britannia), as in this case, at other times being represented by a handsome prince (St. George). The second illustration (figure 2), which appeared as "The Irish Tempest" under the signature of Sir John Tenniel, reworks the same theme against the cultural scenario provided by the Shakespearean play, where "Prospero", "Miranda" and "Caliban" are easily identifiable for the Victorian readers as an analogy for the English state (impersonated through William Gladstone, the leading British statesman and prime minister of the times) which embraces in a protective manner a frightened Ireland/Hibernia, threatened by the clutched fist of the Irish Caliban (with a deformed, animalistic face and body).

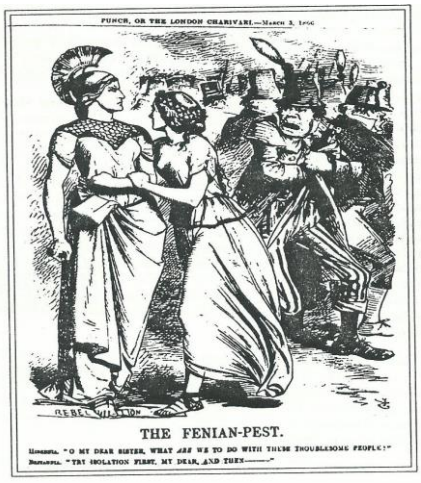

Figure 1[1]

Figure 2[2]

In the reversed side of the mirror, the counter-colonial Irish agenda responded by "emphasizing the manly and masculine traits of the Irish character" (Cairns & Richards 1988: 49), while concomitantly espousing the same tendency to gender the territory in feminine terms. As Richard Kearney explains:

> After the plantations of the 17th century, Ireland became more frequently identified with a vulnerable virgin ravished by the masculine aggressive invader from England.[…] In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the passive daughter seems to assume the more militant guise of a mother goddess summoning her faithful sons to rise up against the infidel invader so that through the sacrificial shedding of their blood, she might be

> miraculously redeemed from colonial violation and become free and pure again – that is, restored to her pristine virginity of language, land and liturgy. (Kearney 1984: 21)

Thus the eighteenth-century *aisling* (vision) poems evolved by native Irish authors exemplify the increasingly political character of this tradition which disguises hopes of political deliverance "in what seemed like harmless love songs" (Kiberd 1996: 16), which rework the conventions of the Gaelic vision tale. Frequently looking outside the country for liberation and the true sovereign, these poems foreground the image of "a willing [and] defenceless *spéirbhean* [sic] or 'sky-woman', who would only recover her happiness when a young liberator would come to her defence" (Kiberd 1996: 18).

Adopted by the majority of the former bardic poets, the genre became highly formalized, its five principal traits being summarized by Breandán Ó Buachalla as:

> 1) a localization of the poem's action, usually in a bedroom or outside near a river, forest, or other type of place with mystical associations; 2) a formalized description of the woman; 3) a request for the woman's identity, in which she is usually compared to classical and Irish beauties; 4) a response in which she rejects these comparisons and identifies herself as Éire; and 5) a message of hope for the people, predicting the return of a Stuart king or Ireland's liberation by the Spanish or French. (in Koch 2006: 33)

For example, Ireland's misfortunes are lamented in the series of elegies composed by the Irish language poet Aogán Ó Rathaille, which "mix personal grief at the starkly diminished circumstances of his life with outrage at the country's chaos" (Welch 1996: 452). At the same time, Ó Rathaille used the new allegorical political vision poem "to express his view of the contemporary state of Ireland and his pessimism regarding her future" (Koch 2006: 1007), being credited with developing the genre to its fullest expression, such as his "Gile na Gile/Brightness Most Bright" (composed c. 1709) illustrates:

> The brightness of Brightness I saw in a lonely path,
> Crystal of crystal, her blue eyes tinged with green,
> Melody of melody, her speech not more with age,

> The ruddy and white appeared in her glowing cheeks. […]
>
> A tale of knowledge she told me, all lonely as she was
> News of the return of HIM to the place which is his by kingly descent,
>
> News of the destruction of the bands who expelled him,
> And other tidings which, through sheer fear, I will not put in my lays. (trans. Patrick S. Dinneen in Murphy & MacKillop 1987: 43-5)

During the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries, the Irish popular ballads favour the trope of the "The Poor Old Woman", an idealised persona of the land who suffers historic wrongs, and, Kali-like, requires the sacrifice of successive generations of sons in the hope that the recurring heroic failures to eject the invader will finally prove successful (also see Mohor-Ivan 2009). In *Transitions: Narratives in Modern Irish Culture*, Richard Kearney has suggested that the Sean Bhean Bocht has been turned into an emblem of Irish nationalism because it is closely linked to its sacrificial mythology in which the blood sacrifice of the heroes is needed to free and redeem Ireland, at the same time in which these heroic sacrificial martyrs are rewarded by being "remembered for ever" (Kearney 1988: 218). Moreover, this nationalist sacrificial mythology can be further tied to pagan concepts of "seasonal rejuvenation" and the sacrificial aspects of Christianity in the Crucifixion and tradition of martyrdom (Kearney 1988: 220).

Composed at the time of the 1798 rising and alluding to the expected help from revolutionary France, "The Shan Van Vocht" uses the poetic motif of the "poor old woman" to express confidence in the victory of the United Irishmen:

> "Oh the French are on the sea," says the Sean Bhean Bhocht,
> "The French are on the sea," says the Sean Bhean Bhocht,
> "Oh The French are in the Bay, they'll be here without delay,
> And the Orange will decay," says the Sean Bhean Bhocht. […]
>
> "Then what colour will be seen?" says the Sean Bhean Bhocht,
> "What colour will be seen?" says the Sean Bhean Bhocht,
> "What colour should be seen where our fathers' homes have been
> But our own immortal green?" says the Sean Bhean Bhocht,

> "And will Ireland then be free?" says the Sean Bhean Bhocht,
> "Will Ireland then be free?" says the Sean Bhean Bhocht,
> "Yes old Ireland will be free from the centre to the sea,
> Then hurrah for liberty!" says the Sean Bhean Bhocht.
> (in MacManus 2005: 511)

As can be seen from the above examples, nationalism itself remains a gendered world, tributary to the patriarchal system in which it operates. Woman is turned into a national abstraction, defined and utilized by men for the ideological naturalization of their counter-colonial agenda, which, in the process, contains and neuters the female agency.

The feminine trope of Ireland will be a constant in the writings of the authors associated with the Irish Revival. A famous example is provided by William Butler Yeats's *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902), which makes use of what Joseph Valente (1994) has called the double-woman trope (i.e. the combination of the Spéar-bhean and the Sean Bhean Bocht into its title figure – who is both young and old, mother and bride, sexual and pure) in order to create its dynamic tension.

Set at the beginning of the United Irishmen Rebellion of 1798, the play takes place in the cottage of the Gillane family, where the eldest son, Michael, is about to be married the next day. An old woman arrives who, taken for a beggar at first, starts to bemoan that she has been set wandering by "too many strangers in the house," who took from her "four beautiful green fields" and then tells of the sacrifices young men have made for her across the ages. Mesmerized by her words, Michael decides to forsake his family and bride in order to go off to fight in the brewing insurrection, and, as the son leaves, the old woman offers no doubt as to what his fate will be:

> It is a hard service they take that help me. Many that are red-cheeked now will be pale-cheeked; many that have been free to walk the hills and the bogs and the rushes will be sent to walk hard streets in far countries; many a good plan will be broken; many that have gathered money will not stay to spend it; many a child will be born and there will be no father at its christening to give it a name. They that have red cheeks will have pale cheeks for my sake, and for all that, they will think they are well paid. (Yeats 1971: 254-5)

Once the young man has been stirred into joining the army that has gathered down on the shore, the Sean Bhean Bocht is transformed into the

Spéar-bhean of the aisling tradition, reverting to the stately beauty of Cathleen ni Houlihan that she enjoyed in a pre-colonial time. The play ends with the family's youngest son arrival, who acknowledges the transformative power of martyrdom, at the same time at which "it asserts not only the superiority of spiritual passion over human love, but the falsity of naturalistic appearances (Innes 1992: 361):

> *Peter*: Did you see an old woman going down the path
>
> *Patrick*: I did not; but I saw a young girl, and she had the walk of a queen. (Yeats 1971: 256)

As such, Yeats not only conflates the two principal images of the feminine Ireland into one, but also re-writes the regenerative myth of Cailleach Beara (The Old Woman of Beara), a queen who supposedly lived seven lifetimes, each time with a new husband. If, at the end of each life, the Queen's youth and beauty were renewed by copulating with a young man of noble blood, in Yeats's version it is death and not sexuality that facilitates the renewal of the land (Cullingford 1990: 12).

According to Joseph Valente, though such nationalist texts run counter to the gendered structures imposed by the British colonialism, what they ultimately achieve is to reinforce another set of gender stereotypes, from an internal, Celtic origin (Valente 1994: 193-4). Such feminine national icons, "while seeming to empower women, actually displace them outside history into the realm of myth. This effectively re-inscribes the woman as devoid of agency" (Fleming 1999: 48). No wonder then that Cathleen has proved an extremely problematic symbol, which has subsequently been scrutinized, deflated or deconstructed to revaluate traditional encodings of womanhood, be they the product of colonial or countercolonial agendas. A telling case in this respect is Maud Gonne's response to Yeats's representation of womanhood. Having played the title-role in the opening production of *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, Gonne published in 1904 in *The United Irishman* her own play, entitled *Dawn*, which embodies her own vision of the woman as nation trope. In contrast to the Yeatsian text in which the mythic woman inspires the men to fight, while the mother/bride are trying to hold Michael to the domestic world, in *Dawn* it is the regular mothers/daughters who represent Ireland's unbroken spirit, and take an active role in initiating the call for violence.

Almost a century later, discussing the potency of such icons of Irish womanhood constructed in Western culture through both the Anglophone and the nationalist discourses, Eavan Boland acknowledges the painful silencing and erasure of the actual women's experience in both the colonial and countercolonial enterprise:

> The heroine, as such, was utterly passive. She was Ireland or Hibernia. She was stamped, as a rubbed-away mark, on silver or gold; a compromised regal figure on a throne. Or she was a nineteenth-century image of girlhood, on a frontispiece or in a book of engravings. She was invoked, addressed, remembered, loved, regretted. And, most importantly, died for. She was a mother or a virgin … Her identity was as an image. Or was it a fiction? (Boland 1995: 66)

Boland's "Mise Eire" (a title which literally translates as "I am Ireland", but can also sound like "misery" when read aloud) returns in time to reclaim the stories and silences of women, filling them now with her own voice, which replaces the one of the male bard, which still reverberates through "songs/that bandage up the history" (an allusion to the native tradition of the aislinge and that of the popular ballads). "I am the woman" – proudly asserts Boland's speaker, who is nolonger a virginal maiden queen or mythical mother, but counteracts the motionless icons in the patriarchal record with a vivid and complex persona who is both a prostitute, "who practises / the quick frictions, / the rictus of delight", and an emigrant mother forced to leave Ireland "on board the Mary Belle, / in the huddling cold, / holding her half-dead baby to her" (in Dettmar 2010: 2780).

By partaking "of female suffering, of the sexual and psychological wounds inflicted on women throughout history" (Lojo Rodríguez 2006: 99), this speaking voice ultimately fractures the gendered mirror of the woman-nation pairing, dislocating both the image of the submissive and frail Hibernia which haunts 19th century English iconographic texts and that of the mythic Cathleen which inspires Irish nationalism with her subversive, even if troublesome portrayal of "Mise Eire".

Notes

1. The illustration was given to the author as handout during the 1995 *Saxons and Celts* seminar, Antrim, Northern Ireland.
2. Retrieved from http://www.aoh61.com/images/ir_cartoons/political_cartoon.htm

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On the Origin of Species: *Adaptation*

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Isabela MERILĂ[**]

Motto:

Adaptation is a profound process. It means you figure out how to thrive in the world. (*Adaptation*, 2002)

Abstract

The question of literature and the media has always been of interest to writers and critics alike, and Charles Kaufman's Adaptation is no exception to the rule. Seen as an intertextual re-telling or transformation of the source text, Charles Kaufman's script discloses its own status not only as a pre-text but also as a theoretical co(n)text made up of universal principles according to which an adaptation works. As such, it is not memory – seen as intertextuality that controls the process or the product of adaptation but rather evolution, i.e. the capacity to adapt and evolve to any given circumstances.

Key words: *species, origin, evolution, adaptation, intertexuality, memory*

We live in a mediating (and mediated) contemporary textualised environment which has left its imprint on the way in which literature is translated into the *other* (written, audio or visual) and which is able to broadcast and recapture, to re-picture and disseminate *memories* in all possible ways. In present-day cinema there are enough adaptations based on everything from comic books to non-fiction novels. We are constantly told and re-told stories, we are shown and re-shown stories and all these diverse means of mediation allow us to rethink how *adaptation* as a process works so as to mediate *adaptation*, as a product.

Charles Kaufman's film *Adaptation* (directed by Spike Jonze, 2002), itself an adaptation of Susan Orlean's non-fiction book *The Orchid Thief*

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(1998) appears to be marked by – if not made up of – such adaptable *elastextity* that it is communicating an incredible amount of theoretical background on the condition of *adaptation* as a process of mutation and transformation, and information on how *adaptations* come to be what they are or what mechanical principles they undertake.

Far from being a mere passive and artificial imitation of the source text, Charles Kaufman's script is a mediator in its own right, a cunningly active carrier of meanings seeking to boost thinking about a set of theories on film adaptation seen as a process of evolution rather than as one of mimetic transposition. 'This natural selection process works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection.' (*Adaptation*, 2002)

Closer to what could be labelled as an experimental film rather than an artistic film, *Adaptation* (2002) challenges its viewers with unconventional boundaries set between identity and a textuality that is stretched across time and media: it is this elastic textuality or *elastextity* that theorizes on questions related to the *who*, the *what* or the *how* of adaptation as product, in general and of adaptation as a process, in particular. 'What am I doing here? Why do I bother to come in here today? Nobody even seems to know my name. I've been on this planet for forty years and I'm no closer to understanding a single thing. *Why am I here? How did I get here*?' (*Adaptation*, 2002)

Accordingly, while apparently describing Charles Kaufman's anxious struggles to write a deceptively impossible script based on Susan Orlean's book *The Orchid Thief,* the film *Adaptation* aims at addressing yet unresolved questions of whether it is possible to adapt literary sources (namely a book on flowers) to the screen (nobody has ever made a film about flowers) or, more exactly, what elements from the written narrative should be transferred to the visual medium and how.

> The script I'm starting is about flowers. Nobody's ever done a film about flowers! So … so *there are no guidelines*! […] Look! My point is that those teachers are dangerous. (…) *Writing is a journey into the unknown. And writers should always have that goal*... It's not building one of your model airplanes. (*Adaptation*, 2002)

Spike Jonze's film based on Charles Kaufman's script does more than simply re-tell the story of the orchid thief (which is the *pre-*

text/aforetext mediated in the foreground) and it even provides the theoretical principles that derive from the process (the pretext/ alleged theoretical co(n)text mediated in the background).

As such, questions on the relationship between literature and film adaptations are backgrounded in Kaufman's own story (Kaufman himself is an adaptation, *the process*; his script is an adaptation, *the product*), Kaufman's relationship to Susan Orlean is similar to the relationship between the literary source (*The Orchid Thief*) and its adaptation (*Adaptation)* and even Laroche's own orchid hunting symbolically becomes the very embodiment of the scriptwriter eager to create a new script, transferring/ translocating the original source from one medium into a new medium and the orchid hunting is his metaphorical journey into the unknown, hunting for the ghost orchid which shares the same features with a ghost, i.e. it only reveals itself when it chooses to do so, if ever.

> [*voiceover*] *Do I have an original thought in my head?* […] *Life is short. I need to make the most of it. Today is the first day of the rest of my life. I'm a walking cliché.* […] *Just be real*. Confident. Isn't that what women [*the source texts*] are attracted to? Men [*adaptations*] don't have to be attractive. But that's not true. Especially these days. Almost as much pressure on men [*adaptations*] as there is on women these days. *Why should I be made to feel I have to apologize for my existence*? Maybe it's my brain chemistry. Maybe that's what's wrong with me. Bad chemistry. All my problems and anxiety can be reduced to a chemical imbalance or some kind of misfiring synapses. I need to get help for that. But I'll still be ugly though. Nothing's gonna change that. (*Adaptation*, 2002)

Questions concerning the *what* or the *how* of the adaptation/ translation/ transmutation/ reinterpretation/ transposition process get their answers in the background especially because while the *film* tells the story of the orchid thief, it simultaneously allows for the parallel existence – or becoming, rather – of another story, that of the film's making, or rather of the genetic codes/ principles which have been borrowed from the original, once the evolution process has started.

In real life, families are characterised by generations of genetic information which is passed on from one bloodline to another, i.e. permutations of genetic extensions which resemble the forefathers but still are different in their unicity. The same applies to Charlie Kaufman's script which discloses its own statuts/ name/ existence as a genetic extension

from the very title (it is an adaptation called *Adaptation*) and which is a mere clone of Susan Orlean's book *The Orchid Thief* (while seemingly re-telling Laroche's story it actually tells the story of every film adaptation as well as of their becoming), so that, what we are left with in the end is not a simple story (since the *plot* of the film cannot be abridged to a few main summarising paragraphs given the disruptive and medling nature of the new *product*) but rather a system of universal *principles,* not rules, of what an adaptation *is* and how it *works* because while a rule says 'You must do it this way!', a principle says 'this works and has through all remembered time!'. (*Adaptation*, 2002)

To all appearances, when it comes to adaptations, *principles are* safer since, on the one hand, 'Writing is a journey into the unknown', and on the other, 'if you're goal is to try and do something new' (*Adaptation,* 2002*)* it is better to embrace originality and creativity rather than go the same acknowledged path because repeating the same *recipe* at all times would stifle originality and variety, and without variety there would be no extension, no evolution, but only imitation.

As a rule, changing a narrative into a film has tempted many film makers to transpose stories to the screen, sometimes so successfully that the adaptation has become a film classic or a 'better' version of the source story. However, in the case of *Adaptation* (2002) the transition from Susan Orlean's non-fiction book to film has been even more difficult mainly because the story (the common denominator, the core) revolves around the main character who is an inanimate thing, i.e. an orchid, so that, chances were that the filmed version, or rather transcoding, might have resulted in a poor adaptation of a great non-fiction story.

Both in Susan Orlean's book and in Charlie Kaufman's film, the orchid (and orchid hunting implicitly) is the common denominator which gives unity and coherence to the source story and to the adapted version as well. Even though from a different outlook, more or less overtly, the film adaptation reveals the double sense associated to the core: on the one hand, the orchid as a species and its own adaptation to evolution from the beginning of times, on the other, adaptation as a species and its own evolution throughout times. What matters is not the (non)plot of the original story, but rather the *core* in its prenarrative and abstract phase, i.e. the natural selection processes that finally result in the product called *adaptation*.

> Point is, what's so wonderful is that every one of these flowers has a specific relationship with the insect that pollinates it. There's a certain orchid look exactly like a certain insect so the insect is drawn to this flower, its double, its soul mate, and wants nothing more than to make love to it. And after the insect flies off, spots another soul-mate flower and makes love to it, thus pollinating it. And neither the flower nor the insect will ever understand the significance of their lovemaking. I mean, how could they know that because of their little dance the world lives? But it does. By simply doing what they're designed to do, something large and magnificent happens. In this sense they show us how to live - how the only barometer you have is your heart. How, when you spot your flower, you can't let anything get in your way. (*Adaptation*, 2002)

Quite an elastic adaptation, the script based on Susan Orlean's book seeks to conceive new ways of rewriting or interpreting preexisting texts and influences readers and viewers into expanding their understanding of texts and of textual influence. What seems to be a mere scientific observation on the nature of the relationship between flowers and insects, the text actually reveals an entire theoretical principle on *adaptation* seen both as a process and as a product, forcing us into rethinking the patterns that guide our reading and viewing habits: according to our individual and collective imaginations, we expand our understanding of such vocabulary pertaining to the *pollination* of orchids and grasp their true elastic meaning by association with a hermeneutic concept that has to do with the fertility of writing and of reading respectively. It is due to the insect (adaptation into a new medium) that the flower (any source text) gets reproduced and, by extension, becomes immortal (mainly due to the fact that bits and pieces of its genetic code get retransmitted/ passed of from one generation to another), serving thus a vital role in the process of cultural production. In fact, if we were to follow T.S. Eliot's *Tradition and the Individual Talent,* then we wouldn't be wrong to say that in our interpretation of the adaptation, the latter may be influenced by the cannon itself but it may also alter the canon itself (providing a theoretical co(n)text which is foregrounded by a fictionalised one).

> - Absolutely! And Orlean makes orchids so fascinating. … I don't want to remain true to that! *I want to let the movie exist rather than be artificially plottered.*
> - Great! I guess I'm not exactly sure what that means!

> - Oh! *I'm not sure I know what that means either. I just don't want to ruin it by making it a Hollywood thing.* Like orchid house movie or something. Changing the orchids into poppies and turning in a new movie about drugs, you know.
> - Definitely!
> - Why can't there be simply a movie about flowers?
> - I guess that we thought that maybe Susan Orlean and Laroche could fall in love.
> - Yes. I'm saying it's not about crime and sex or guns or car chases… you know… the characters… you know… learning profound life lessons or growing or coming to like each other or overcoming obstacles to succeed in the end… it's… it's … *the book isn't like that! And life isn't like that! You know! It just isn't! And… I feel very strongly about this.* (*Adaptation*, 2002)

In the case of Charles Kaufman's *Adaptation*, Susan Orlean's *The Orchid Thief* is moved from the page to the screen where it is brought to life while simultaneously being cast in the shadow of its extended offspring which is privileged.

> John Laroche: You know why I like *plants*?
> Susan Orlean: Nuh uh
> John Laroche: Because they're so *mutable. Adaptation is a profound process. Means you figure out how to thrive in the world.*
> Susan Orlean: [pause] Yeah but it's easier for plants. I mean they have no memory. *They just move on to whatever's next.* With a person though, adapting's almost shameful. It's like running away.

By extension, *adaptation* is 'a profound process' that does not entail *intertextuality* (referred to as *memory*) but rather *change* and, most importantly, *evolution* 'to whatever is next' (which is another form of *memory,* a particular one, preserved in the genetic code of the source text). Moreover, neither infidel to, nor betraying of the source text, neither violating nor bastardising the source text, neither desecrating nor deforming the source text, the *adaptation* process implies above anything else, *evolution.* It is in keeping with this ability to evolve, mutate and adapt that the species survives.

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Ambivalence Towards the Traditional Victorian Model of Femininity in Rosa Nouchette Carey's *Rue with a Difference*

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Abstract

Like other novels by Rosa Nouchette Carey, Rue with a Difference *focuses on female experience as revealed through women's concerns surrounding their various family roles. It deals with marriage and maternity at a time when such domestic-related issues were obsolete and when the pervasive ideology of domesticity gave way to late Victorian ideologies. The novel's adherence to traditional domestic ideals was one of the reasons why it was considered outdated and doomed to oblivion for the most part of the twentieth century. Attempting to reassess Rue with a Difference from a more neutral perspective afforded by the passage of time, the present article is designed to prove that the novel does not fully approve the domestic ideology, displaying instead an ambivalent attitude towards it and its model of femininity. By comparing the representations of feminine family roles in* Rue with a Difference *with the non-fictional accounts of the models of womanhood promoted by the contrasting ideologies of Victorian culture, the paper will show that the angelic ideal is both supported and subverted within the same fictional text through the mixture of traditional and non-traditional features defining the main female characters.*

Keywords*: representation, feminine family role, model of femininity, Victorian ideology, character construction*

Rosa Nouchette Carey was a prolific English writer of the late Victorian and Edwardian periods. She was popular during her literary career mainly due to her female readership, who did not care too much whether her novels were highly appreciated by mainstream (male) critics or not (Hartnell 2000: 194). However, Carey's work was less enthusiastically received by critics and reviewers, who had mixed opinions about its quality (Crisp 1989: 23-24) and who increasingly considered it to have become outdated (Hartnell 2000: 191-192). The concern of Carey's novels with

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domestic matters relating to women at a time when the attention of the "supposedly well-informed" was concentrated on the New Woman is one of the reasons why these writings had been progressively dismissed since the last years of the nineteenth century and forgotten for a large part of the twentieth century. The present article is intended to contribute to the recovery of the fiction written by Rosa Nouchette Carey, which began at the end of the twentieth century, through the analysis of the most important female characters in *Rue with a Difference.* It attempts to prove that, despite the preoccupation with domesticity, Carey's novels do not render female characters in total accordance with the traditional feminine model defined by Victorian domestic ideology, endowing them with certain attributes characterising the New Woman. This aspect reveals the ambivalence towards the angelic ideal characteristic of Carey's works and their relatedness to the model of femininity prevalent during the period when *Rue with a Difference* was published.

Before presenting the main characters performing feminine family roles and determining the extent to which traditional and late Victorian concepts of womanhood are embedded in their construction, it is useful to briefly describe these concepts. Traditionally, Victorian women were expected to live up to the ideal of the Angel in the House. This model of femininity, which was promoted by the domestic ideology, depicted the ideal woman as a moral paragon in her roles of wife and mother. The angelic woman emanated a quiet and beneficial influence over her husband and children by displaying a wide range of positive moral qualities and feminine virtues, such as purity, innocence, sensitivity, gentleness, submissiveness, love, self-sacrifice, altruism and devotion (Nelson 1995: 20, 24, 30; Showalter 1999: 14; Nelson 2007: 27, Mitchell 2009: 267; Gorham 2013: 5). It was her mission to transform the home into a sanctuary of harmony, emotional security, health and comfort (Harrison 2000: 157).

In contrast to the traditional ideal of womanhood, the model of femininity which emerged and became increasingly popular during the last two decades of the nineteenth century – the New Woman – was not concerned with domesticity and femininity. Instead, it was concentrated on broadening women's public roles and on increasing women's rights, making them more similar to men (Rees 1977: 15; Vicinus 2013: ix-x). The New Woman was "mannish" and lacked all the features defining the Angel in the House (Sage 1999: 465). She was "unloving to children, impatient of

home and all that this includes" (Lynn Linton 1896: 43). In other respects, this type of woman had more social, economic and sexual independence than Victorian domestic ideology granted to women (Black et al. 2010: 103).

It is against the contrasting models outlined above that the two major female characters in *Rue with a Difference* are measured, attention being mainly paid to those similarities and differences which show how the traditional ideal is undermined in favour of the late Victorian feminist ideal.

One of the female characters the novel focuses on is Valerie, an upper-middle-class young widow. Although this woman is endowed with numerous positive moral qualities characteristic of the Angel in the House, such as tenderness, patience, maternal devotion and self-sacrifice, which describe her as an ideal mother, she is not an ideal wife and woman in the traditional sense. The narrative discloses through a range of external analepses, that Valerie "intellectually and spiritually [outgrew]" (Crisp, Ferres and Swanson 2000: 99) her husband and that their views differed on every subject. While Valerie was guided by the maxim "truth in word and truth in action" (*RWAD*: 34), her husband's words and preaching, as he was a clergyman, were inconsistent with his actions. Aware of her husband's lack of integrity, Valerie inwardly revolted against it, her life being transformed into "a secret martyrdom" (*RWAD*: 35). Despite her efforts to fulfil all her wifely responsibilities, her inner rebellion hindered her from being an angelic wife and from creating a warm domestic atmosphere for her husband. Being dissatisfied with her husband's inconsistency, Valerie could not be contentedly submissive to him, as the ideal wife was expected to be (Showalter 1999: 14), because, in her case, absolute and unquestioning submissiveness meant a compromise to her own integrity.

Valerie's disappointment in her husband generated a deep yearning for freedom from her unhappy marriage. Valerie has not fought for her wifely independence, nor has she openly expressed her desire to be independent. Therefore, this desire of her is revealed exclusively through her thoughts cluttering her mind after she regains her freedom through widowhood:

> Valerie hardly understood herself at this period of her existence; she seemed to have come to a parting of the ways. Behind her lay the old

> unsatisfying life, with its crushed hopes and bitter disillusions, its eager demands for happiness, its soul hunger and material prosperity, and before her lay the unexplored years – poverty and many cares – and freedom. Yes, freedom! For the first time since her girlhood she was free to live up to her own ideals of truth and duty. There were no galling restrictions on her liberty, no arbitrary human will to coerce her actions or fetter her movements. The obedience of the wife had sorely trammeled her, but the widow was a free woman; her path might be lonely and desolate, but there were no obstructions; her earthly and heavenly horizons were wider as they opened out before her sad eyes (*RWAD*: 177).

The first sentence and the final clause of the last sentence of this excerpt indicate that Valerie's inner world is focalized from her own perspective, which means that Valerie is both the internal character-focalizer and the focalized. From her point of view, which is supported by the external narrator, her wifehood was a painful experience because it did not satisfy her expectations and limited her autonomy. These two reasons are strongly emphasized here through the use of multiple phrases and words that convey the same or similar meanings. The first reason is pointed out through such phrases as *unsatisfying life*, *crushed hopes*, *bitter disillusions*, *eager demands for happiness* and *soul hunger*, and the second one is highlighted through the following synonymous groups of words: *galling restrictions*, *coerce her actions*, *fetter her movements*, *sorely trammelled her* and the term *obstructions*. The great variety of the lexical items employed to describe the same aspects of Valerie's former life seems to disclose the magnitude of its stifling effects, which have generated her overwhelming desire for freedom, best textually rendered in this quotation through Valerie's inner exclamation *Yes, freedom!*. Despite her confusion about the state she finds herself in, Valerie steps into the new phase of her life, which offers her, along with many difficulties, the long-yearned freedom to live according to her standards.

One more trait that Valerie has in common with the New Woman and that marks the departure of her image as a woman from the angelic ideal is her break with convention. Valerie is different from other women and unconventionality is the first characteristic assigned to her when she is introduced in the novel through other characters' perspectives. The novel begins with a dialogue between two women who discuss Valerie's behaviour after her husband's death. As stated by one of them, Valerie is "inexplicable"

(*RWAD*: 5), "a complete enigma" (*RWAD*: 4) and a woman with "a complex, [baffling] personality" (*RWAD*: 1). The reason this woman and some other characters do not understand Valerie and find fault with her conduct is that she does not conform to usual customs and traditions. For instance, they are shocked that Valerie wears regular clothes instead of mourning attire, "her sole concession to conventionality" being the black colour of her dress and the white of her cuffs and collar which indicates that she is a widow (*RWAD*: 16). Although Valerie is conscious of other people's disapproval of her uncommon behaviour, she stands firm on her position and does not try to satisfy the societal expectations just to please them.

Besides her opposition to the custom of wearing mourning, Valerie has an unconventional outlook on marriage. She strongly endorses the egalitarian marriage built on love, which contradicts the patriarchal hierarchy advocated by the domestic ideology and the convention of marrying for financial security or social standing. The novel shows that Valerie considers equality and love as essential for a successful marriage through her repeated attempts to persuade her stepdaughter that "marriage without love is the one unpardonable sin" (*RWAD*: 269). Valerie's support of an equitable relationship between spouses is also demonstrated by the fact that, in spite of her bitter marital experience, she renounces her status as a widow in favour of a married life with the man who treats her as his equal and respects her high principles of integrity and honesty. The external narrator tacitly assents to this view of matrimony by presenting at the happy end of the story three egalitarian couples, including that of Valerie and Mr. Nugent. Such an outcome is implicitly indicative of the narratorial approval of Valerie's character as well, which is also suggested by the agreement existing between narrative and descriptive textual passages characterising Valerie and the argumentative parts of the text, through which the dominant ideology of the novel is directly communicated. Moreover, notwithstanding that the external narrator-focalizer generally does not criticise or openly agree with the protagonist's thoughts, words and actions, holding an apparently neutral position, there are some cases when the narrative explicitly states that Valerie is right in her surmises and opinions about other characters, which contribute to revealing its approving attitude towards her.

Valerie's strong, unconventional individuality, her desire for freedom and lack of complete wifely submission are the major similarities

between her image as a woman and the late Victorian feminine ideal. And although these characteristics are enough to prove that Valerie is not the epitome of the Angel in the House, they provide insufficient basis for regarding her as the embodiment of the New Woman. Valerie's description as a devoted and loving mother is the major argument against the late Victorian concept of femininity, which encouraged a hostile attitude towards motherhood. Apart from that, Valerie differs in many other respects from the New Woman. For instance, she is not intolerant of home and of everything related to it; she is not involved in the public sphere and displays feminine rather than masculine behaviour and habits. Accordingly, the novel's representation of the late Victorian upper-middle-class woman through the character of Valerie is a combination of traditional and unconventional features in which the former clearly prevail. Nonetheless, Valerie's endowment with certain attributes associated with late Victorian womanhood indicates that the literary text under the lens supports, to a limited degree, the New Woman ideology, carefully deconstructing the domestic ideology and its most pervasive ideal, which continued to be stereotypically ascribed to middle-class women up to the end of the nineteenth century.

The second female character depicted in *Rue with a Difference* is Pansy, Valerie's stepdaughter. Even from the opening pages of the novel, Pansy is described as an unconventional, late Victorian daughter. In spite of the fact that she has been brought up according to idealised expectations and upper-middle-class conventions regarding a daughter's education, namely she is educated at home by a governess (Steinbach 2012: 142), she enjoys more freedom than the ideal Victorian daughter was granted by the domestic ideology (Frost 2009: 33). Victorian domesticity expected daughters to remain in their parents' home until marriage, where their activities were strictly controlled (Nelson 2007: 86). These requirements were less commonly met during the decades before the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when the domestic ideology lost its popularity among the middle classes, being undermined by the New Woman ideology and child-centred doctrines (Griffin 2012: 38, Tosh 1996: 84-85, Robertson 2006: 422). Consequently, late Victorian middle-class girls were allowed more freedom of expression and action than their predecessors (Frost 2009: 165). Along these lines, the independence Pansy is given after her governess is dismissed by being permitted to wander in

Austria and the Tyrol, far away from her parents, who "have no possibility of communicating with her" (*RWAD*: 6), is a characteristic of her image as a girl that conflicts with the idealisation of girlhood promoted by the domestic ideology and that indicates similarity with the late Victorian model of femininity. Therefore, Pansy's long wandering in foreign lands, which is called "Bohemian and up to date" (*RWAD*: 6) and which describes her as an unusual young woman, is strongly disapproved by a minor character with traditional ideas.

Unconventionality characterises other aspects of Pansy's identity as well. It is expressed through her picturesque clothing, which suits her perfectly, and through her vivid and dramatic speech, related by the external narrator to her liking for "strong situations and startling paradoxes" (*RWAD*: 60). Another valuable indicator of Pansy's individualistic personality is the pleasure she takes in shocking other people by her nonconformity to social norms. She is proud of being different from others and does not hide her own opinions and preferences, having an aggressive attitude towards people she dislikes. Pansy is portrayed as being too outspoken and straightforward not only with people outside her family, but also with those living in the same house with her. Even though she is "keenly alive to the minor morals of life" (*RWAD*: 305), being brought up in refined society, and despite her love for each member of her family, there are cases when she is so direct and blunt with them that she offends them. Such straightforwardness is a sign of Pansy's misbehaviour and clearly not one of the traits the ideal Victorian daughter was expected to display.

Pansy's excessive outspokenness is not the only facet of her behaviour that portrays her as a naughty child, and, accordingly, as an unconventional daughter. The novel reveals the fact that Pansy fails in various respects to conduct herself in an acceptable manner. The external narrator frequently emphasises that the girl's way of acting is inappropriate by using explicit remarks such as: "Pansy, who was in one of her perverse moods, turned a deaf ear to this" (*RWAD*: 276); "It was the act of an undisciplined child" (*RWAD*: 266); "being in a mischievous mood" (*RWAD*: 353); etc. Moreover, all the qualities that designate Pansy's behaviour as bad – like perversity, waywardness, irritability, wilfulness, opposition, wrong-headedness – are directly mentioned in the text mainly by the external narrator, but also by other characters, in particular by Valerie.

Pansy herself acknowledges that she behaves "like a wayward child, and [tries her stepmother's] patience" (*RWAD*: 337). These explicit means of qualifying Pansy are supported and reinforced by the qualification communicated through the words she utters to the people close to her and through the actions she displays towards them when she is in one of her mischievous or perverse states of mind.

While Pansy's attributes described above indicate that her image as a daughter is not constructed in accordance with the angelic ideal, the latter is only partially challenged. Despite her instability of moods and the prevalence of negative traits during distressing times, Pansy behaves in a warm and friendly manner towards her stepmother. When she is in one of her good moods, she delights Valerie with "her bright companionship" (*RWAD*: 252). Similarly, she was a good companion for her father, thus performing one of the duties the Victorian domesticity required daughters to fulfil towards their parents (Nelson 2007: 84, 87). Even when Pansy is in one of her obstinate or perverse moods, she is not disrespectful to her stepmother. She does not quarrel with Valerie, even if their opinions about Pansy's relationship with Gurth, her betrothed, are entirely different. Instead, with deep emotion, Pansy explains to her stepmother that she is sad for not being able to follow her advice. This is one of the reasons why the girl's self-assertion does not affect their close relationship, which otherwise is strengthened by Pansy's generosity and unselfishness. These two virtues are displayed in Pansy's actions towards Valerie, as she selflessly offers herself to help her stepmother, like Ruth, whom she identifies with, to Naomi (*RWAD*: 70). She moves together with Valerie and her son in a humble cottage in order to take care of her family, oblivious to her own interests and comfort. She lavishly spends her income on them and is willing to live more modestly to save money for Ronald's education. In addition, she offers Valerie moral support in difficult moments. Therefore, Valerie calls her "the best lover and the most liberal giver in the world" (*RWAD*: 85). Being endowed with generosity, self-sacrifice, devotion and tenderness, Pansy's image as a daughter approximates, in this respect, the image of the ideal Victorian daughter.

Putting all the pieces together, the novel's filial figure represented through the character of Pansy is particularly complex, combining traditional and non-traditional, late Victorian elements, thus departing from both Victorian concepts of femininity in focus. On the one hand, although Pansy

has very good relationships with her parents, providing both of them with her warm companionship and showing her unselfish generosity to her widowed stepmother, she is not an ideal daughter. Being a girl with unbalanced personality, Pansy is often dominated by negative moods that influence her behaviour. Hence, she is frequently described as a naughty, wayward daughter, who also disobeys her parents by choosing to marry against their wishes. On the other hand, despite Pansy's bold self-assertion and her freedom to display her individualistic, contradictory personality, which are points of similarity between the fictional depiction of the late Victorian middle-upper-class girl and the New Woman, there are many differences between the two. Pansy is not characterised by masculine qualities and does not display a conflictual attitude towards domesticity, nor is she interested in having any achievements in the public domain. Nonetheless, this female character shares enough features with late Victorian womanhood to indicate that the Angel in the House is both supported and subverted.

Both representations of feminine family roles in *Rue with a Difference* are distinguished by a mixture of attributes associated with the angelic Victorian woman and the New Woman, with the former predominant. Accordingly, they are not rendered in consistency with any of the two models of femininity defined by the contrasting ideologies at work within Victorian society. The characters' departure from the traditional standards of womanhood reveals an ambivalent attitude towards Victorian domestic ideology. Consequently, the argument that Carey's writings are committed to the ideal of domesticity – one of the reasons due to which they were neglected – is refuted, without denying the fact that *Rue with a Difference* is more concerned with traditional matters than with those which were increasingly popular at the end of the nineteenth century. This latter aspect seems to be the result of the requirements Rosa Nouchette Carey had to meet if she wanted her works to be published (Hartnell 2000: 10). Nevertheless, as far as its author's condition as a woman writer allowed, the novel under the lens displays the ideological context of the late Victorian middle classes, at a time when old and new concepts coexisted, by building the images of late Victorian upper-middle-class women out of traditional and non-traditional elements. Thus, *Rue with a Difference*, as well as other novels by Carey, facilitates the modern audience's understanding of the ideas and concepts governing middle classes of the late nineteenth-century England, being of significant value for present-day readers and critics alike.

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Writing on the Woolfian Palimpsest. Michael Cunningham's *The Hours*

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Abstract

Contemporary literary texts increasingly recycle older writings, assuming extra depth and addressing a cultivated reader. Their scaffolding reveals the intertextual net and renders the reading process at once challenging and rewarding. A case in point is Michael Cunningham's 1998 novel, The Hours – Woolfian in content, form and politics, with obvious references to Mrs. Dalloway, as well as oblique allusions to "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" and other writings. Along these lines, the paper is intended to advance an analysis of Cunningham's multi-layered novel, foregrounding its dialogism and the strategy of its discourse.

Keywords: *novel, discourse, intertext*

Introduction

Michael Cunningham's rewriting Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and recycling the novel's initial title (*The Hours*) seventy-five years after the project's inception, and over three thousand miles across the Atlantic, show literary experimentation at its best, in the tradition assumed and carried through. Accepting the challenge of reviving the already canonical high modernist novel discourse, Cunningham seems to embark upon a risky journey, yet he manages to create a meaningful postmodernist frame for the kaleidoscopic range of topics resonant of Virginia Woolf's, as mentioned in the Tuesday, June 19th 1923 entry of her *Writer's Diary*:

> But now what do I feel about *my* writing? – this book, that is, *The Hours*, if that's its name? One must write from deep feeling, said Dostoyevsky. And

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> do I? Or do I fabricate with words, loving them as I do? No, I think not. In this book I have almost too many ideas. I want to give life and death, sanity and insanity; I want to criticise the social system, and to show it at work, at its most intense. (1953: 57)

Overtly acknowledging the literary heritage that the late twentieth century text inscribes itself within, in one of the peritexts introducing *The Hours* – another relevant entry from Woolf's *Diary* (of August 30th, 1923) – Michael Cunningham announces the underlying theme, while simultaneously revealing the deliberately chosen strategy and technique, as well as the narrative scaffolding supporting the world(s) of his novel.

> I have no time to describe my plans. I should say a great deal about *The Hours* and my discovery: how I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters: I think that gives exactly what I want; humanity, humour, depth. The idea is that the caves shall connect and each comes to daylight at the present moment. (1953: 60)

The "beautiful caves" in the background of *The Hours* seem to be exactly what has brought the novelist The Pulitzer Prize and the PEN/Faulkner Award in 1999, one year after the book's publication. Their role in representing the human condition trespasses the boundary of American topics (considered for either of the two famous prizes), but is essential in opening up the text to multiple interpretations by a global readership, invited to decode the language and structure of the novel in order to reach its deepest significance.

Writing on the Woolfian palimpsest, Michael Cunningham's "language for the individual consciousness", to quote Mikhail Bakhtin, "lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's." (1981: 293) He tells his story in words which are appropriated, which have had previous 'owners', previous uses, which have been contaminated by previous contexts. The double-voiced discourse of *The Hours* "expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author." (Bakhtin 1981: 324) Virginia Woolf's voice(s) and Cunningham's own are intertwined to destabilise any authoritarian construction of society, any so-proclaimed 'truthful' representation of the world.

But Cunningham's discourse is not simply horizontally heteroglot. It is also built vertically so as to show literary tradition as a continuous flow, as eternally in the (re)making – supporting Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality, whereby any text also feeds on previous ones and, in turn, informs future writing. Obvious in *The Hours* is the coincidence of the "horizontal axis (subject-addressee) and [the] vertical axis (text-context)", which "bring[s] to light an important fact: each word (text) is an intersection of words (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read." (Kristeva 1980: 66) The identifiable literary corpus which may be read into *The Hours* includes, but is not restricted to *Mrs. Dalloway*, *A Writer's Diary*, *Suicide Note*, *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*, *Modern Fiction*, *Men and Women*, *A Haunted House*, *To the Lighthouse*, *The Lady in the Looking-Glass* – which will be foregrounded in what follows.

(Inter)Textual Architecture in *The Hours*

The novel's matrix consists of a prologue and twenty-two chapters – all unexpectedly entitled 'Mrs. Dalloway'[1], 'Mrs. Woolf'[2] or 'Mrs. Brown'[3], occurring in varying combinations and permutations, in sets or groups of twos and threes: DWB, DWB, WDB, WDB, WD, WDB, DBW, BD.

The prologue briefly describes the surroundings of Monk House, the country residence Leonard and Virginia Woolf owned in Rodmell, near Lewes, East Sussex, and then suddenly plunges the reader into the waters of the River Ouse where, on March 28th 1941, Virginia Woolf, aged 59, chose to end her life. The suicide note she left (retrieved and preserved at the British Library) is inserted in the novel and used to build the sought after atmosphere of "life and death, sanity and insanity." The ensuing image built is that of her body bouncing in the undertow, trapped "against one of the pilings of the bridge at Southease" (Cunningham 2002: 7), while up above a mother is holding her little boy to see the troops driving past. "[Virginia's] face, pressed sideways to the piling, absorbs it all: the truck and the soldiers, the mother and the child." (2002: 8) From beyond, the world at the surface is grimmer, duller still, somehow justifying the final act, and the conveyor belt existence of three women that follows is the argument supporting the thesis.

The first, Virginia Woolf, is built out of illustrative fragments: at her most fertile (writing the novel in 1923) and her most fragile (committing

suicide in 1941); incapable of separating reality from imagination, she lives through her fiction, accepting, for some time, the therapy of writing. The second, Laura Brown, is the stereotypical post-war American housewife and mother, trying to find personal fulfilment beyond her bland status of a 'happily married' woman; she is constructed as the reader of Woolf's novel, who empathises with its central character; the place is Los Angeles; the year is 1949. She also appears at the end of the novel, fifty years later. The third, Clarissa Vaughan, also known as Mrs. Dalloway, lives in New York, at the end of the twentieth century (1999); the fifty-two-year-old publisher re-enacts, with a vengeance, the life of Woolf's character, proof of the real being contaminated and modified by fiction rather than the other way around.

The interlinking of the main characters and their mirrors in *The Hours* and *Mrs. Dalloway* shapes the puzzle and outlines the architecture Cunningham advances.

Level 1: The writer

On one level, that of the writer, as Cunningham confesses in *A Note on Sources* at the end of his novel, the people "who actually lived appear in this book as fictional characters", and he has "tried to render as accurately as possible the outward particulars of their lives as they would have been on a day [he]'s invented for them in 1923." (229) Scenes from Richmond overlap those from Rodmell, in a mix of lived realities that only fiction is capable of outlining, which shows Cunningham's opting to add the socio-cultural dimension of the Woolfs' life, with their (especially Leonard's, actually) contribution to promoting the modernist aesthetics through primarily publishing the works of the Bloomsbury Group at the Hogarth Press.

As for the additional sources informing the text, they include various Woolf biographies, monographs, correspondence, autobiographies published by Leonard Woolf posthumously, articles and reviews on her non-fictional writing (the numerous direct quotes from *Mrs. Dalloway* being saved for later, to support the subsequent levels, of reader and character).

Even if not explicitly referred to, Virginia Woolf's *Modern Fiction* may easily be read into the fabric of Cunningham's novel, here as elsewhere, and promote it as breaking with precursor modes of writing and

outdated patterns of thought (with chronological referentiality deliberately slipping from under control).

> 'The proper stuff of fiction' does not exist; everything is the proper stuff of fiction, every feeling, every thought; every quality of brain and spirit is drawn upon; no perception comes amiss. And if we can imagine the art of fiction come alive and standing in our midst, she would undoubtedly bid us break her and bully her, as well as honour and love her, for so her youth is renewed and her sovereignty assured. (in McNeille 1984: 164)

Moreover, like Virginia Woolf, Michael Cunningham – speaking from a position which interrogates the complexity and highly personal nature of sexuality – discards patriarchy and the materialism it instituted, although not altogether. Significant examples of canonical, male produced literature are given by both to confess to valuable sources of inspiration, but also to point to the necessary shift inwards, towards the previously silenced, feminine universe. If Woolf, for instance, uses to this end the words of a character Thomas Hardy created – 'I have the feelings of a woman', says Bathsheba in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 'but I have only the language of men.' (1977: 44) –, Cunningham openly admits to this goal, while acknowledging her contribution, saying

> One of the things that I so love about Virginia Woolf is [...] her insistence that outwardly ordinary lives are anything but ordinary to those of us who are living them. We find our lives to be fascinating and of epic proportions. And Woolf came along – with Flaubert, who was a little bit earlier, and Joyce – and said, essentially, no, no, no. There is no such thing as an ordinary life. There are only inadequate ways of portraying the lives of the people of Earth. To me, Woolf was especially heroic because she insisted not only on the importance of outwardly ordinary lives but the importance of women's lives. (Interview for Radio Free Europe, December 5, 2010)

In *The Hours*, Cunningham imports Woolf's free indirect style to add a covert meta dimension and to render the creative process, having Virginia narrate about Virginia (frequently to Virginia) as she writes her *Mrs. Dalloway*. The first mention of her retreat in fiction is one of anticipation, of using the coming hours to bring to light the treasure buried in the shadows of her being[4], as she begins her day:

> This is one of the most singular experiences, waking on what feels like a good day, preparing to work but not yet actually embarked. At this

> moment there are infinite possibilities, whole hours ahead. Her mind hums. This morning she may penetrate the obfuscation, the clogged pipes, to reach the gold. She can feel it inside her, an all but indescribable second self, or rather a parallel, purer self. If she were religious, she would call it the soul. […] She picks up the pen. *Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself*. (Cunningham 2002: 34)

Two hours later, as the headaches and voices return to torment her, Virginia reads her first scribbled pages and meditates on what (and how) she has written so far. In so doing, and with the reader in mind, crucial decisions are made as regards the future of the narrative and the state of its newly-born central character.

> It seems good enough; parts seem very good indeed. She has lavish hopes, of course – she wants this book to be her best book, the one that finally matches her expectations. But can a single day in the life of an ordinary woman be made into enough for a novel? […] Clarissa Dalloway will die, of that she feels certain, though this early it's impossible to say how or even precisely why. She will, Virginia believes, take her own life. Yes, she will do that. (Cunningham 2002: 69)

The next 'Mrs. Woolf' chapter features Virginia walking along the streets of Richmond and pondering on the 'me' and the 'you' of the same personality, on past experiences and imminent death (very much like Eliot's Prufrock[5]), specifically on the sins and alternatives/motivations for suicide available to her Clarissa.

> Clarissa will have had a love: a woman. Or a girl, rather; yes, a girl she knew during her own girlhood; one of those passions that flare up when one is young; […] during that brief period of youth when one feels free to do or say anything; to shock, to strike out. […] Eventually she will come to her senses, as young women do, and marry a suitable man. Yes, she will come to her senses, and marry. She will die in middle age. She will kill herself, probably, over some trifle (how can it be made convincing, tragic instead of comic?). (Cunningham 2002: 81-82)

The afternoon finds Virginia entertaining her sister, Vanessa, and her children. The latter (and the bird funeral ceremony they organise in the garden) trigger thoughts of life and death / fertility and sterility, made to bear on her life and autobiographical writing, eventually changing the course of her novel-child.

> This, Virginia thinks, is the true accomplishment; this will live after the tinselly experiments in narrative have been packed off along with the old photographs and fancy dresses, the china plates on which Grandmother painted her wistful, invented landscapes. (Cunningham 2002: 118)

> Clarissa, she thinks, is not the bride of death after all. Clarissa is the bed in which the bride is laid. (2002: 121)

The warm commonness and safe familiarity of the scene where Virginia has five o'clock tea in the kitchen with Vanessa (whom she also unexpectedly kisses), while engaged in small talk about children and buying them coats, fascinate the writer and change her mind for good with respect to the evolution of her autobiographical character.

> There is this hour, now, in the kitchen.

> Clarissa will not die, not by her own hand. How could she bear to leave all this? […] Someone else will die. It should be a greater mind than Clarissa's; it should be someone with sorrow and genius enough to turn away from the seduction of the world, its cups and its coats. (Cunningham 2002: 153-154)

The recurring headaches and grim thoughts which make Virginia suddenly leave the house that evening, on her way to the train station and, from there, to London (where she would have settled had she not been intercepted and brought back home by Leonard) bring about the fear of nothingness in life and fiction alike.

> It is the close of an ordinary day. On her writing stand in an unlit room lie the pages of the new novel, about which she cherishes extravagant hopes and which, at this moment, she fears (she believes she *knows*) will prove arid and weak, devoid of true feeling; a dead end. (Cunningham 2002: 163)

The last 'Mrs. Woolf' chapter is governed by Virginia's hope of experiencing the bustling London life again, as well as by the clarification of her writing strategy. With the authority of the decision-maker, the novelist spares Clarissa and turns her tale into a tragedy by choosing the rebel, the visionary as victim.

> Yes, Clarissa will have loved a woman. Clarissa will have kissed a woman, only once. Clarissa will be bereaved, deeply lonely, but she will not die. She will be too much in love with life, with London. Virginia imagines

> someone else, yes, someone strong of body but frail-minded; someone with a touch of genius, of poetry, ground under by the wheels of the world, by war and government, by doctors; a someone who is, technically speaking, insane. […] Yes, someone like that. Clarissa, sane Clarissa – exultant, ordinary Clarissa – will go on, loving London, loving her life of ordinary pleasures, and someone else, a deranged poet, a visionary, will be the one to die. (Cunningham 2002: 211)

All in all, this first level of *The Hours* is the foundation on which Cunningham places his building bricks to design the storeys inhabited by Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Dalloway. On the other hand, the dialogism and intertextuality which threaten its stability confer dynamism to the novel and add the element of surprise consisting in the clashing views expressed and in the abrupt shifts from one speaker / 'language' / point in time to another.

Level 2: The Reader

On another level, that of the reader, a day in the Brown family's life is brought forth, featuring Laura – the character who takes one back to Virginia Woolf's *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*, despite the fact that the 1924 essay is not mentioned among Cunningham's sources. It is striking, however, how this most elusive character of *The Hours* reminds of Woolf's "phantom": "My name is Brown. Catch me if you can." (1924: 1) The story Virginia Woolf tells in her treatise on modernism explains much about the frame and the nucleus of Michael Cunningham's demarche. Her character

> sits in the corner of the carriage – that carriage which is travelling, not from Richmond to Waterloo, but from one age of English literature to the next, for Mrs. Brown is eternal, Mrs. Brown is human nature, Mrs. Brown changes only on the surface. (Woolf 1924: 13)

His serves a similar purpose, rewriting tradition, with insertions of individual talent, as T. S. Eliot might say[6].

The literary theory put forward in 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown', and taking material shape in *Mrs. Dalloway*, is also identifiable in *The Hours*.

> Both in life and in literature it is necessary to have some means of bridging the gulf between the hostess and her unknown guest on the one hand, the writer and his unknown reader on the other. […] The writer must get into touch with his reader by putting before him something which he recognizes, which therefore stimulates his imagination, and makes him

> willing to cooperate in the far more difficult business of intimacy. (Woolf 1924: 14)

By making Laura Brown a latter-day equivalent of Mrs. Brown, but also by converting her into a reader of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Cunningham offers Woolf the perfect recipe for encoding, then decoding an idea, a state of mind sooner than any creature in flesh and blood. Laura/Mrs. Brown – "the spirit we live by, life itself" (Woolf 1924: 21) – is used in negotiating the multiple meanings generated by the representation of the self in and the self of fiction, with the readers

> as partners in this business of writing books, as companions in the railway carriage, as fellow travellers with Mrs. Brown? For she is just as visible to you who remain silent as to us who tell stories about her. […] But do not expect just at present a complete and satisfactory presentment of her. Tolerate the spasmodic, the obscure, the fragmentary, the failure. Your help is invoked in a good cause. (Woolf 1924: 20-21)

Deciphering the young and old Laura Brown appearing in the novel – on the one hand trapped in a marital relationship with dull Dan (and the allusion to Dan Brown, the writer, does not seem be accidental), and on the other hand having freed herself from the ties of convention (at the end of a journey of self-discovery, away from both husband and children) – is the mind game proposed by Cunningham, who thus proves Virginia Woolf right once again, when she predicts that "we are trembling on the verge of one of the great ages of English literature. But it can only be reached if we are determined never, never to desert Mrs. Brown." (Woolf 1924: 21)

The first "Mrs. Brown" chapter of *The Hours*, set in Los Angeles, presents pregnant Laura waking up in the morning and starting to read *Mrs. Dalloway*. Fascinated by the ethereal universe of the novel she does not want to leave, she vents her anger at the clock on her nightstand, "this hideous thing, with its square green face in a rectangular black Bakelite sarcophagus." (2002: 37) And so she begins her day in June, with the sacrifice of the ideal for the modest joys of domesticity. Whole sections from Virginia Woolf's novel are inserted in Cunningham's text without any notice (or referencing for that matter), to access both the book inside the book and Laura's stream of consciousness. (2002: 37, 38-39, 40-41; 42, 48) In Laura's mind, facilitated by Cunningham's use of free indirect speech and

subtle irony, the writer and the reader overlap and are seen as sharing similar purposes.

> [S]he is fascinated by the idea of a woman like that, a woman of such brilliance, such strangeness, such immeasurable sorrow; a woman who had genius but still filled her pockets with a stone and waded out into a river.
>
> Here is the brilliant spirit, the woman of sorrows, the woman of transcendent joys, who would rather be elsewhere, who has consented to perform simple and essentially foolish tasks, to examine tomatoes, to sit under a hair dryer, because it is her art and her duty. (Cunningham 2002: 42)

The next glimpse into Laura's universe reveals her willing her banal life onto herself. The equation includes her husband, her son Richie (who is helping her make a cake), and the second child she is about to bear. The (re)solution, however, is overburdening, which is why the temptation to follow in the footsteps of more emancipated women remains strong.

> She will not lose hope. She will not mourn her lost possibilities, her unexplored talents (what if she has no talents, after all?). She will remain devoted to her son, her husband, her home and her duties, all her gifts. She will want this second child. (Cunningham 2002: 79)

The third section focuses on Laura's conversation with her neighbour and friend, Kitty (with whom she shares an unexpected kiss), about women's life, death and literature. The models discussed are that of apparent marital bliss, childlessness and gynaecological ailment (in Kitty's case), that of deeply ingrained unhappiness as (house)wife and mother without any possibility of personal growth (in Laura's case), and that of *Mrs. Dalloway* (the novel) – both capturing and questioning the surface and the inner core of a woman's being.

> Kitty has seemed, until this moment, like a figure of bright and tragic dignity – a woman standing by her man. So many of these men are not quite what they were (no one likes to talk about it); so many women live uncomplainingly with quirks and silences, the fits of depression, the drinking. Kitty has seemed, simply, heroic. (Cunningham 2002: 109)
>
> They are both afflicted and blessed, full of shared secrets, striving every moment. They are each impersonating someone. They are weary and

> beleaguered; they have taken on such enormous work. (Cunningham 2002: 110)

The fatigue of wearing the expected social mask is amplified in the fourth 'Mrs. Brown' chapter, which sees Laura check in a hotel and ponder on the liberating potential of self-inflicted death. The novel she has brought with her and is now reading, as well as its author, offer a way out and eventually help her make her final decision: in favour of life, in favour of self-sacrifice.

> Still, she is glad to know (for somehow, suddenly, she knows) that it is possible to stop living. There is comfort in facing the full range of options; in considering all your choices, fearlessly and without guile. She imagines Virginia Woolf, virginal, unbalanced, defeated by the impossible demands of life and art; she imagines her stepping into a river with a stone in her pocket. (Cunningham 2002: 152)

Laura's next step tracked by *The Hours* is that of picking up Richie and plunging into life once again. The adult Richard is founded here, in the silent bond between mother and son. Perceptive, the little boy reads beyond Laura's cover, worried about the deep waters menacing her calm surface.

> He is devoted, entirely, to the observation and deciphering of her, because without her there is no world at all. […] He will watch her forever. He will always know when something is wrong. He will always know precisely when and how much she has failed. (Cunningham 2002: 192-193)

The sixth entry further narrates Laura's "day in June", with the small-scale party she is "hosting" on Dan's birthday. As night falls and the last page of these her twenty-four hours is read, her entrapment is complete. Chronology and routine, silence and convention are her accepted deaths for the time being.

> She herself is trapped here forever, posing as a wife. She must get through this night, and then tomorrow morning, and then another night here, in these rooms, with nowhere else to go. She must please; she must continue. […] Laura reads the moment as it passes. Here it is, she thinks; there it goes. The page is about to turn. (Cunningham 2002: 205, 208)

The last 'Mrs. Brown' chapter sums up Laura's day and advances metafictional remarks about the specificity of literature and the nature of

interacting with its universe. Using Woolf's mode of writing, Cunningham has his character-observer-reader take up the task of analysing the self in fiction and the self of fiction.

> She might, at this moment, be nothing but a floating intelligence; not even a brain inside a skull, just the presence that perceives, as a ghost might. Yes, she thinks, this is probably how it must feel to be a ghost. It's like reading, isn't it – that same sensation of knowing people, settings, situations, without playing any particular part beyond that of the willing observer. (Cunningham 2002: 215)

This episodic "spasmodic", "obscure", "fragmentary", "failure" (of) Mrs. Brown, with feminist undertones, represents Virginia Woolf's rejuvenated legacy, and demonstrates Michael Cunningham's wit and skill of recycling an otherwise hermetic writer, benefitting the contemporary reader.

Level 3: The Character

The patchwork of Laura's construction forms the bas of the third level, that of the character, which is structured around the figure of Clarissa Vaughan. Her day, like Clarissa Dalloway's (and Laura Brown's), is devoted to organising a party; her special occasion is meant to honour her former lover, gay close friend, Richard (Richie) Brown – the poet suffering from AIDS and mental illness, who has recently been awarded a prestigious prize for his life's work. This level brings the Woolfian philosophy on the contemporary American stage, where it helps outline the 'new' woman, still carrying the traces of the old.

The first section of this re-enactment of Clarissa Dalloway's day introduces Clarissa Vaughan, and explains her literary birth.

> The name Mrs. Dalloway had been Richard's idea – a conceit tossed off one drunken dormitory night as he assured her that Vaughan was not the proper name for her. She should, he'd said, be named after a great figure in literature, and while she'd argued for Isabel Archer or Anna Karenina, Richard insisted that Mrs. Dalloway was the singular and obvious choice. […] She, Clarissa, was clearly not destined to make a disastrous marriage or fall under the wheels of a train. She was destined to charm, to prosper. So Mrs. Dalloway it was and would be. (Cunningham 2002: 11)

Experiencing the intense rhythm of New York City, while running errands and buying flowers, she bumps into an old acquaintance (Walter Hardy) – who is in town for the medical treatment of his spouse, Evan – and invites him to the party despite strongly disliking him (just as Clarissa Dalloway bumps into Hugh Whitbread – who has arrived in London to visit his wife, Evelyn, in a nursing home – and makes a similar invitation to a similarly despised character).

The celebrities who interrupt the flow of thought rendered in both novels (assumed to be Meryl Streep or Vanessa Redgrave in *The Hours*; The Queen, The Prince of Wales, or The Prime Minister in *Mrs. Dalloway*) build atmosphere and cultural specificity (Eighth Street and Fifth Avenue; Oxford Street and Piccadilly), simultaneously ridiculing the British high life and its American simulacrum.

What Cunningham adds to Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* is a meta level which outlines his Clarissa's functional status. At the flower shop, an apparently casual conversation between Clarissa and Barbara – customer and saleswoman – sets the stage for a serious discussion on the borderline separating reality from fiction, as the florist (embodying the uneducated reader) is checking whether Clarissa-the-woman is the same as Clarissa-the-character in Richard's novel. While Clarissa Dalloway only exchanges pleasantries with Mrs. Pym – the florist –, Clarissa Vaughan – the character in the novel inside the novel whose main character she is as a consequence of intertextual contamination – has supplementary burdens to carry in-between and outside the pages of the book(s).

The second 'Mrs. Dalloway' chapter, in which Clarissa pays her daily visit to Richard, is actually dedicated to drawing the latter, an essential character in the structure of *The Hours*.

> [He] alone sees through to your essence, weighs your true qualities […], and appreciates you more fully than anyone else ever has. It is only after knowing him for some time that you begin to realise you are, to him, an essentially fictional character, one he has invested with nearly limitless capacities for tragedy and comedy not because that is your true nature but because he, Richard, needs to live in a world peopled by extreme and commanding figures. (Cunningham 2002: 61)

The whole scene is fractured. On the one hand, there is the sordid materiality of Richard's accommodation facilities and of his abundant medication. On the other hand, there is his beautiful abstract mind and his

perfect analytical skills, which are therapeutic to a certain extent and for a certain period of time. The symbol of the window (recurrent in Woolf's fiction also) illustrates yet another separation: between pulsating life and dormant existence. Like Clarissa in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Richard is contemplating death and looking through one of his windows at an old woman's window, across the street, still noticing signs of life there, in her having moved around the three decorations she keeps on the sill. His drive to life remains stronger for the time being, fuelled by Clarissa's presence and energy.

The flashbacks Clarissa experiences in the following chapter dedicated to 'Mrs. Dalloway', with Sally, her life partner, in the background, bring Richard to the limelight once again. The memory of the kiss they shared on the outskirts of Plymouth, at Wellfleet, when they were young (and she was reading Doris Lessing), and the total (though fleeting) happiness it brought turns Richard into the very source of well-being and explains her clinging on to him for life.

> It had seemed like the beginning of happiness, and Clarissa is still sometimes shocked, more than thirty years later, to realize that it *was* happiness; that the entire experience lay in a kiss and a walk, the anticipation of dinner and a book. […] Now she knows: That was the moment, right then. There has been no other. (Cunningham 2002: 98)

The scene reminds of *Mrs. Dalloway*, with Clarissa going through her day under the pressure of memories about Bourton, and with Peter Walsh remembering how he had been passionately in love with her and how he had never felt happier than during their boating trip on the lake by moonlight at Sally Seton's suggestion. The characters are changed, their roles permutated, but the central notions of time passing and the joy of life fading are preserved and skilfully rendered.

Clarissa's receiving the early visit of Louis Waters (another 'ghost' from her past) in the next chapter establishes another link with sunnier times – preserved to alleviate the illness of being.

> Clarissa returns with two glasses of water […], and at the sight of her Louis smells the air – pine and grass, slightly brackish water – of Wellfleet more than thirty years ago. His heart rises. […] She still exudes, somehow, an aspect of thwarted romance, and looking at her now, past fifty, in this dim and prosperous room, Louis thinks of photographs of young soldiers, firm-featured boys serene in their uniforms; boys who died before the age of

> twenty and who live on as the embodiment of wasted promise. (Cunningham 2002: 127)

The other connection made, with a soldier's untimely death, brings Virginia Woolf's Septimus to mind, and with it, the shadow of death looming large over one's continuous present.

The generation gap focused on in the fifth 'Mrs. Dalloway' section also supports the idea of time passing and of cyclical life. Finding it easy to understand her eighteen-year-old self, but impossible to communicate with her nineteen-year-old daughter, Julia (Elizabeth), Clarissa wonders about the bond between parents and children, about love and hate, in true Woolfian style[7].

> Clarissa holds Julia, and quickly releases her. "How are you?" she asks again, then instantly regrets it. She worries that it's one of her tics; one of those innocent little habits that inspire thoughts of homicide in an offspring. Her own mother […] prefaced all contrary opinions by saying, "I hate to be a wet blanket, but –" Those things survive in Clarissa's memory, still capable of inspiring rage, after her mother's kindness and modesty, her philanthropies have faded. (Cunningham 2002: 156)

The successive scenes covering talk of adapting novels for the screen, and visits to high end shopping arteries – having Sally at the centre – in the sixth 'Mrs. Dalloway' unit append more meditations on the consumerist society and the loss of moral values, within the same cyclical routine of living.

> Death and resurrection are always mesmerizing, Sally thinks, and it doesn't seem to matter much whether they involve the hero, the villain, or the clown. (Cunningham 2002: 180)

Explanatory for Cunningham's strategy in *The Hours*, Sally's thoughts reinforce Mrs. Woolf's hesitation in choosing the perfect 'victim' to die in the novel and continue dying multiple deaths, with each future reading, thus paradoxically living on.

The character who dies and, dying, stays alive, is Richard. The choice is Mrs. Woolf's – in that the visionary will pay the final price – and Michael Cunningham's – avenging, through rewriting, the imprisonment of Virginia Woolf's Clarissa in her marriage to Richard Dalloway. This occurs in the penultimate 'Mrs. Dalloway' chapter, where Richard comes to his

final epiphany and, like Septimus, throws himself out of a window (turned here into a reversed symbol), leaving Clarissa shell shocked.

> She does not move. She finds the window of the old woman, with its three ceramic statuettes (invisible from so far down). The old woman must be at home, she hardly ever goes out. Clarissa has an urge to shout up at her, as if she were some sort of family member; as if she should be informed. (Cunningham 2002: 202)

This ending, though much more direct and violent, makes explicit that which is understated in Virginia Wool's novel, as ageing Clarissa ends her day and watches the symbolical spectacle of an old woman who, after staring at her from the window of her room across the street, turns off the light and goes to sleep – mirroring Clarissa Dalloway's fate and approaching death[8].

Correspondingly, the closing chapter of *The Hours* brings together an old woman and an ageing one – Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Dalloway – stepping out from the fictions they have inhabited up to this point.

> Here she is, then; the woman of wrath and sorrow, of pathos, of dazzling charm; the woman in love with death; the victim and torturer who haunted Richard's work. Here, right here in this room, is the beloved; the traitor. Here is an old woman, a retired librarian from Toronto, wearing old woman's shoes.
>
> And here she is, herself, Clarissa, not Mrs. Dalloway anymore; there is no one now to call her that. Here she is with another hour before her. (Cunningham 2002: 226)

Two ordinary women emerge from Michael Cunningham's novel, which circularly returns upon itself and the main Woolfian texts which hold it together on multiple levels: *Mrs. Dalloway* and 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown'.

Conclusion

Cleverly crafted, the architecture of Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* displays three layers, each of which is cemented by an intertextual net whose knots are Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, *A Writer's Diary*, *Suicide Note*, *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*, *Modern Fiction*, *Men and Women*, *To the Lighthouse*, *A Haunted House*, *The Lady in the Looking-Glass* (not to mention

Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* or Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*) – which in turn branch out to other, multiple writings generated by world literature.

An explicit exercise in rewriting, therefore "a most outspoken form of intertextuality" (Fokkema 2004: 6), it might receive criticisms either of commercial motivation or of over-complexity. Nevertheless, it seems little likely that, in our contemporary world, texts are produced in strict isolation, protected against external contaminating factors, and, with a text like *The Hours*, "[plunging] us into a network of textual relations" (Allen 20111: 1), the phenomenon is more than evident.

It also seems little likely that a limited perspective, a simple technique or a superficial narrative structure meets the expectations of a reading public already accustomed to polyphony and high experimentation. In Cunningham's own words, "what I wanted to do was more akin to music, to jazz, where a musician will play improvisations on an existing piece of great music from the past" (2003: 111).

The musicality of the novel only partly results from the voices he weaves into it (British and American, feminine and masculine, sane and insane, present and absent, old and new, ordinary and elitist). The carefully orchestrated literary practices and techniques employed by the writer show ingenuity and versatility. Indeed, the language of *The Hours* clearly indicates that Cunningham masters all the tricks of the trade. Abrupt beginning, open ending, suspense, coincidence, defamiliarisation, surprise, irony, comedy, symbolism, romanticism, stream of consciousness, unreliable/multiple narrators, free indirect style, metafictional caveats and asides, etc. are all part of the strategy of his discourse.

Notes

1. Abbreviated here as D.
2. Abbreviated here as W.
3. Abbreviated here as B.
4. The notion is developed at length by Virginia Woolf in her short story, 'A Haunted House', where it is used as a metaphor for love.
5. See the poem 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' (1917).
6. See the essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919).
7. See little James's reaction to his father, Mr. Ramsay's objective comment on the weather, in the opening pages of *To the Lighthouse* (1927).

8. See the short story 'The Lady in the Looking Glass' (1929), in which Woolf develops on the symbol of the mirror as revealing the ugly and the old, telling one's story in advance.

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Romanian Cultural Identity After Admission to the European Union

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Abstract

This article aims to report on the cultural identity of Romanians after Romania's admission to the European Union as described by Romanians themselves, especially in light of the trending unofficial appropriation of the term "European" to be synonymous with European Union status. A semi-structured survey was conducted that included twenty-two adult Romanians, Romanian being defined by holding Romanian citizenship. The data was then coded according to social science methodology to categorize emerging themes and aid in analysis. The analysis revealed four prominent themes that give insight into specifically the political landscape of Romania through Romanian cultural identity after Romania's admission to the European Union. Issues of concern for participants were the metaphorical marginalization of Romania politically and economically within the European Union and problems of corruption, but contrasted with a strong overall commitment still to staying within the European Union and simultaneously maintaining good relations with their non-European Union neighbors.

Key words: *European Cultural Identity, Culture and Politics*

In recent years in both French and English, I have often heard the term "European" been used synonymously to refer to a citizen of a country inside the European Union. However, I find this description problematic, because European is a description for people inhabiting an entire continent, not simply those residing within the European Union. As a cultural anthropologist, the appropriation of the term European to be synonymous with residing inside the European Union, made me want to further examine what cultural identity means for citizens of countries living on the geographic edge of the E.U. Notably, those whose neighbors might not be E.U. members or whose E.U. neighbors are in many ways pulling away from the social and democratic commitments that are supposed to be prerequisite for membership to the E.U. (e.g. Poland and Hungary). This

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article will specifically examine these questions in regard to Romania. I surveyed twenty-two adult Romanians with the major question of what is Romanian cultural identity after Romania's admission to the European Union. Participants had various ages ranging from 20-64 and resided in various cities in Romania or lived outside of Romania and still had retained their Romanian citizenship status. Requirements for participating were being over 18 years of age and being a citizen of Romania, including with dual nationality, if applicable.

It should be noted that despite having survey participants who are diverse in terms of age and geography, most of the participants can be categorized as highly educated, meaning that younger participants were enrolled in bachelor's degree programs and all older participants held at least a bachelor's degree or higher. Furthermore, due to the fact that I do not speak Romanian, all of the participants spoke Romanian and English, and often a third or fourth language. For the purposes of obtaining information for my research, this was very helpful, but it does limit the demographic of participants I was able to reach. Thus, the findings I present may not account for the other viewpoints that could be widely held by other demographics of Romanians regarding Romanian cultural identity after admission to the European Union.

Based on the survey responses, four themes emerged regarding the cultural identity of Romanians after joining the E.U. Theme One is that Romania sits at a cultural, geographic and political crossroads between Western Europe and Eastern Europe and it is the gatekeeper between these two spheres. Theme Two is that Romanians feel connected to both the European Union and European countries outside of the E.U. Theme Three is Romania is on the economic and political periphery of the European Union. Theme Four is Romania belongs in the European Union but abysmal levels of corruption (as described by Romanians) prevent Romania logistically from having a more politically and economically central role in the European Union. Whether all of the participant responses are based on objectivity or rather sometimes self-replicated clichés that are internally harbored in Romanian culture is not possible to distinguish.

However, self-reported descriptions of Romanian cultural identity give others a window through which to understand the current social and political situation in Romania, a country that sits in a pivotally strategic location, but is often unknown to outsiders. This is because as Kellner

(2003: 2) writes: "Culture in the broadest sense is a form of highly participatory activity, in which people create their societies and identities. Culture shapes individuals, drawing out and cultivating their potentialities and capacities for speech, action, and creativity." This is to say that culture does not exist in a vacuum and Romanians are passively reporting on their cultural identities. Rather, Romanians through their own lived experiences that shape their cultural identities are helping (either consciously or unconsciously) to form the social (and inevitably at least partially political) landscape of Romania that exists through their active creation of culture.

In the 21st century, it is impossible to talk about the culture and politics of a country without speaking about borders. Passi (2011: 28) writes, "Any valid contextual theorization of boundaries should combine at least such processes, practices and discourses such as the production and reproduction – or institutionalization – of territoriality/territory, state power, human agency and human experience." This qualitative research highlights the element of the human experience as reflected by descriptions of cultural identity, which in this context, gives non-Romanians another lens through which to learn about Romania's contemporary society and politics as formed in part also by its borders. The concept of borders plays a key role in this study, because a requirement for participation was Romanian citizenship. That is to say that the cultural identity that is being examined through this research is not based on simply an ethnic link to Romania, but rather a legal one defined by borders. Moreover, the central question of this study is: what is Romanian cultural identity after Romania's admission to the European Union? Status within or outside of the European Union is once again defined by official borders. However, perhaps what is most interesting in relation to the survey responses and border studies is the unofficial border that many respondents designated Romania as between Eastern and Western Europe.

The first theme that emerged from the survey is that Romania sits at a cultural, geographic and political crossroads between Western Europe and Eastern Europe and it is the gatekeeper between these two spheres. When participants were asked to describe the geographic location of Romania from their own point of view, phrases such as "at the crossroads or borderline between East and West" were reoccurring responses. Another participant specifically described Romania's location as, "being at the gate between East and West." Participants felt as though they have always been

a part of both sides of Europe and one respondent stated that his identity as a Romanian has not changed after admission to the European Union, since being European is part of what defines being Romanian itself as well, because clearly Romania sits on the European continent. Other responses to describe Romania's geographic location grouped it in Central Europe, the Balkans or Southeastern Europe. Perhaps Romania's cultural identity of a Latin country surrounded by Slavic or Hungarian neighbors (with the exception of the Republic of Moldova) has put the country in a unique situation of not having a shared cultural identity with its surrounding neighbors. However, because of Romania's distance from other Latin countries and the very different historical path Romania took from countries that might be more culturally similar, such as Italy, Romania also does not find direct solidarity either with its Latin counterparts in Western Europe. This information, when placed within the framework of how the appropriation of the term "European" to mean only within the European Union has affected Romanians, appears to support the idea that Romanians have always viewed themselves as Europeans. Furthermore, Romanians belong to both Western and Eastern Europe, irrelevant of the changes in terminology regarding "European" identity associated sometimes now with only being inside of the E.U.

This segues into the second theme from the research that appeared, which is that Romanians feel connected to both the European Union and European countries outside of the E.U. Participants were asked about how Romania should interact with neighboring countries outside of the E.U. and if Romania should stay in the E.U. in two separate questions. In regards to the relationship Romania should have with non-E.U. neighbors, all of the responses were neutral or positive. Reponses included similar variations of phrases such as, "We should stay open and friendly." A few respondents included comments that Romania should support non-E.U. neighbors with bids to join the E.U. or should continue to work on bilateral projects, regardless of the other country's status outside of the E.U. When asked if Romania should stay in the E.U., 95% responded yes, that Romania should remain. These responses bolster the idea that Romania is an important link between E.U. and non-E.U. countries culturally and also politically. Ross (2009: 134) writes, "…culture is important to the study of politics, because it provides a framework for organizing people's daily worlds, locating the self and others in them, making sense of the actions

and interpreting the motives of others, for grounding an analysis of interests, for linking identities to political action, and for predisposing people and groups towards some actions and away from others."

In terms of cultural identity and politics, Romanians (based on the participant group) do not seem to be influenced by the types of hyper-nationalistic and extreme right rhetoric that have become pervasive in Hungary and Poland. Rather, Romania holds a special cultural place that could be much better utilized in the political realm to mediate more common development goals between E.U. and non-E.U. countries. The open-mindedness reflected in the cultural landscape of Romania should serve as a sign for other countries within the E.U. to assist Romania in achieving a more central political and economic role within the European Union. This role could especially include facilitating the successful entry of future new countries to the European Union, which were also former communist countries.

However, the third theme the research revealed is that Romania is for the moment on the economic and political periphery of the European Union. In terms of culture, Romanians see themselves as belonging to the European Union and wanting to have a relationship with more powerful E.U. counterparts in the West. But according to Romanians, E.U. members from the West look down upon Romanians. One participant said that the Western states see Romanians as the "poor cousins from the Balkans." Therefore, culturally, Romania is also pushed to the edge of the E.U. not by Romanians but by other E.U. members in the West. Although organically the majority of Romanians have kept a cultural identity that is friendly to both E.U. and non-E.U. countries, it works against the interests of not just Romania, but the European Union as a whole to continuously allow Romania to remain at the edge of the E.U. in all the possible senses. Romanians see themselves culturally as friendly with their more Western counterparts. But if these other states continue to not provide a central space for Romania politically and economically, they run the risk of eventually dissatisfied Romanians possibly identifying disproportionately with their Eastern side and becoming more amenable to illiberal rhetoric. The concept of "European" as only being part of the E.U. actually enhances illiberal rhetoric, as it becomes the unintentional foil to the language and cultural identity founded on illiberal politics. Krastev and Holmes (2018: 127) write, "The ultimate revenge of the Central and East European

populists against Western liberalism is not merely to reject the 'imitation imperative,' but to invert it. We are the real Europeans, Orbán and Kaczyński claim, and if the West wants to save itself, it will have to imitate the East."

Mainstream Romanian cultural identity, as interpreted from the survey group, is far from reflecting illiberal politics. However, the theme of Romania being at the edge of the E.U. was abundantly clear. The E.U. must be careful that Romanians do not one day feel as though they do not belong in the European Union anymore by always being shoved to the periphery. The E.U. should act to centralize Romania's political and economic position while the cultural landscape of Romania is still equally Eastern and Western and therefore open and amenable to equal political and economic participation with both E.U. and non-E.U. members in order to create a more prosperous and secure continent of Europe as a whole.

Moreover, the fourth theme that developed from the research is that Romania belongs in the European Union, as reported by participants, but that abysmal levels of corruption (as described by Romanians) prevent Romania logistically from having a more politically and economically central role in the European Union. The vast majority of participants commented in the survey about how concerned they were with corruption in the Romanian government. For comparative purposes, I interviewed a security studies expert from Bulgaria who said in reference to both Bulgaria and Romania, "Unless the E.U. finds a balancing act between support and efficient control, its authority will only diminish, and the two countries will remain marginal."

In summary, the E.U. must act to assist Romania in a stronger way to address its corruption issues and by doing so at the same time draw Romania more into the economic and political center of the E.U. The barriers to Romania not being more central in the E.U. at the moment are internal corruption in the government and a lack of interest from more powerful Western E.U. members to truly treat Romania as an equal member. The barrier, however, is not one based on the mainstream cultural identity of Romanians. Most Romanians want to be part of the European Union and for Romania to hold a more important place as a member state. The European Union should act immediately and swiftly to capitalize on this cultural openness to the European Union, while it is still present among the majority of Romanians. As evident from Hungary and Poland,

issues of cultural and national identity underpin the current rhetoric and momentum of illiberalism. The European Union would be smart to support Romania now with stronger and more tangible actions to combat corruption and to draw the country more into the metaphorical center of the E.U. Many Romanians are amenable to these actions as shown through survey responses, but if the E.U. waits too long, there may be a potential risk for mainstream Romanian cultural identity to change and thus the political landscape of Romania with it, which could create a new desire for illiberalism among the general population.

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Identity in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* by Milan Kundera

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Abstract

Drawing on essays concerning Mitteleuropa, this article attempts to describe aspects of cultural identity in Milan Kundera's novel, The Unbearable Lightness of Being. The historical challenges that this particular geographical and cultural area encountered are reflected in relation to a struggle to maintain a certain cultural identity, encumbered by the Soviet influence in Czechoslovakia. A threatened identity relies on its cultural life, but the characters in Kundera's novel also resort to a certain identitary separation and seek for a refuge in love. The Czech writer's novels emphasize an unavoidable obsession with the totalitarian space, seen as a trap for an individual's identity and personal freedom. Combining the essayistic reflection and a philosophical speculation within a narrative frame, the writer succeeds in rendering something more valuable than a beautiful story: a story brimming with ideas.

Keywords: *identity, Mitteleuropa, polyphony, counterpoint, political novel*

Having become an outcast in his own country back in 1968, Milan Kundera has chosen to live in one of Europe's solid democratic states, France, and started writing in French in 1993. This identitary shift was both a free choice and a necessary act, explained the author to the media.

Unlike his countryman, Václav Havel, Kundera preferred an external exile, not an inner one. France allowed the writer a full artistic growth, as well as free speech, without any political interference. He became famous both for his novel and his role as a relevant voice for issues regarding cultural identity in Central Europe. The articles that he signed in British, French and American newspapers have signalled the disappearance of Central Europe, the consequences of the Soviet oppression and Europe's ignorance regarding Mitteleuropa.

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Although Kundera is one of the apologists of Mitteleuropa as an identitary concept, his literary success represents to a lesser extent a destiny pertaining to Central Europe, according to Mircea Mihăieş and Vladimir Tismăneanu:

> În această regiune (Europa Centrală), personalitățile sunt judecate în lumina potențialului lor suicidar. [In this region, personalities are judged in relation to their suicidal potential.] (1998: 27)

Mihăieş and Tismăneanu question the real Central-European identity: to whom does it really belong? To the one that leaves (Kundera) or to the one that stays (Havel)? In any case, their view of the world is noteworthy:

> Amândoi au văzut nebunia vieții de fiecare zi supravegheată de Steaua Roşie. Dar unul o vedea cu o întristare pascaliană, pe când celălalt i-a descoperit comicul deşănțat. Pentru cel dintâi, lumea era o glumă fără sens. Pentru celălalt, gluma era însuşi sensul lumii. [They both saw the daily life craziness being watched over by the Red Star. But one of them saw it through a Pascalian sadness, while the other discovered its depraved comic aspects. For the former (Havel), the world was a joke without any meaning. For the latter, (Kundera) the joke was the meaning of the world itself.] (29)

In order to prevent insurgences when they occupied Czechoslovakia, the Russians have attacked Czech culture, not the media, since culture holds the most fundamental human values and has stirred in the past some of the revolts in Europe. A "worn down" culture allows for the dissolution of national identity. This is perhaps why Kundera states in his essay *The Tragedy of Central Europe* that a Central-European identity has to fight hard against the pressure of time, which leaves culture behind, since Parisians, for instance, no longer talk about books and cultural magazines, but about shows:

> (...) doar într-o lume ce-şi păstrează dimensiunea culturală, Europa Centrală îşi mai poate apăra identitatea, mai poate fi văzută drept ceea ce este ea cu adevărat. Adevărata tragedie a Europei Centrale, prin urmare, nu este legată de Rusia, ci de Europa. [(...) only in a world which maintains its cultural dimension can Central Europe defend its identity and be seen as what it really is. The real tragedy of Central Europe, therefore, is not about Russia, but Europe.] (1997: 235)

Václav Havel had stated in an interview that Kundera is not "one of us". Tony Judt asks:

> Ce este, atunci, domnul Kundera? Este – sau a devenit – un intelectual francez. [What nationality is, then, Mr. Kundera? Is he – or has he become – a French intellectual?] (2000: 75)

Judt notes that most of his writings concentrate a series of debates concerning Mitteleuropa, which reveal the French intellectual more than the Czech writer. On the other hand, Michael Heim, Kundera's translator in the US, has a different opinion:

> Acum Kundera îşi spune scriitor european. Ceea ce şi este. Ultimele două cărți le-a scris direct în franceză. Dar, după mine, el continuă să fie un scriitor ceh. Şi e extrem de conştient de rădăcinile sale. [Now Kundera calls himself a European writer. Which he is. The last two books were written directly in French. But, in my view, he continues to be a Czech writer. And he is very much aware of his roots.] (1999: 87)

Just like Elias Canetti, Karel Čapek, Bohumil Hrabal, Czeslaw Milosz, Danilo Kiš and Robert Musil, Kundera defies formal limits regarding literary species and discourses, thus combining the essay, a historical discourse and fiction. Central-European literature could be seen as a space of confessions about a common, real topos, which is reconstructed and multiplied by individual memory:

> Ideea de a insera eseuri în corpul romanului este acum foarte răspândită în literatura postmodernă; în Europa Centrală ea există de multă vreme şi a constituit un mod cât se poate de firesc de expresie literară. Toate acestea, aforismele, variațiunile, romanul filosofic, reprezintă un ansamblu coerent, în sensul că literatura central-europeană se deschide înspre abstract, e o literatură care trăieşte din idei, or acest lucru lipseşte din literatura anglo-americană. Literatura anglo-americană trăieşte din istorisire, din epic (...). [The idea of inserting essays at the heart of the novel is now extremely popular in postmodernist literature; in Central Europe, it has been around for many years, and has constituted a natural means of literary expression. Aphorisms, variations, the philosophical novel – all represent a coherent ensemble, showing that Central-European literature opens itself to the abstract, that it lives on ideas, something that is missing from Anglo-American literature. Anglo-American literature lives through storytelling, through the epic (…)] (161)

For Kundera, a novel could merge together an ironical essay, autobiographical fragments, a narrative discourse, historical facts and fantasy, for the purpose of a unitary polyphony. Keywords also play an important part:

> A theme is an existential inquiry. And increasingly I realize that such an inquiry is, finally, the examination of certain words, theme-words. Which leads me to emphasize: A novel is based primarily on certain fundamental words. It is like Schoenberg's *tone-row*. In *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, the *row* goes: forgetting, laughter, angels, litost, border (2003: 59-60).

These keywords are turned into "categories of existence". In this regard, Michael Heim notes:

> (...) el practică, în mod conştient, un lucru care îl face atractiv pentru mulți cititori. El îşi învață publicul ce anume vrea ca el să citească sau să ştie; îi spune, de plidă, *asta e dragostea* (…) [(...) he consciously professes a thing which makes him attractive for many readers. He teaches his audience what he wants them to read or know; he tells them, for instance, *this is love* (...)] (1999: 107).

The use of keywords also emphasizes essential aspects in the internal structure of a character. In *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, characters are built around issues concerning weight versus lightness, soul versus body, woman, kitsch, compassion, music. For instance, at one point when Tereza looks herself in the mirror, she recalls her past and her mother's, an opportunity for the narrator to introduce us to the body problem, as part of the complex existential code that defines this character.

Much like *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1978), *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* offers a complex vision of the terrible atmosphere that followed Prague Spring and Soviet invasion in Czechoslovakia. Exploring themes such as love, sexuality, loyalty and betrayal, the story unfolds two couples' destinies: Tomas and Tereza, Franz and Sabina, as well as a perspective on history. The four characters showcase the drama of the intellectual and artist who is obliged to face totalitarianism. They are all forced to split their identity: the social and cultural one hangs upon the grim political context, while the intimate one tries to save itself through love.

The Unbearable Lightness of Being follows a pattern which Kundera seems to prefer in particular: "My novels are variants of an architecture based on the number seven." (Kundera 2003: 62) This type of narrative architecture relies on counterpoint as an equal placement of different elements, which ensures unity. Taken from musical composition, this technique is the basis for alternating polyphonic narrative with a continuous narrative: "Let me return to the comparison between the novel and music. A part is a movement. The chapters are measures. These measures may be short or long or quite variable in length. Which brings us to the issue of tempo. Each of the parts in my novels could carry a musical indication: *moderato*, *presto*, *adagio*, and so on." (63) Polyphony is thus something more pertaining to art than technique, actually. In the novel, dream and fantasy sequences, the narrative and all the philosophical meditations are combined in a seamless, organic form. The sixth part, for instance, tells the story of Stalin's son, Iakov, and includes a theological meditation, while giving an account of Franz's death and of Tomas' burial. Here, the characters become essayistic "resources", examples for the debate on the kitsch problem.

All philosophical meditations in the novel succeed in enriching its gnoseological value. Talking about human condition allows the narrator a more serious and profound inquiry of existence. One of these philosophical themes, Nietzche's thoughts on the eternal return, is formally supported by analepsis, as some scenes and events are recalled from different points of view many times over (Tereza's, Tomas's or through *mise en abyme* by the auctorial narrator).

For an unexperienced reader, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* might seem to be just a love story. A womanizer who prefers erotic friendships without any sentimentality involved, for the sake of sexual freedom, Tomas "is torn" between permanent lovers and fleeting relationships. What Tereza offers him is a love made up of gestures such as holding hands, which threaten his carelessness. Although he remains unfaithful, Tomas falls in love with Tereza. The other couple, Franz and Sabina, is the complete opposite: Franz is totally committed to Sabina, while she's the one being unfaithful.

Nevertheless, on a more careful reading, the novel unveils some political issues. A Czech's identity, his individuality, his freedom of action and freedom of speech take on new social and political dimensions, since

they are either dissolute, or terribly split. In his struggle to resist and survive in a totalitarian space, an individual is constantly threatened by the secret police, who has several functions: "[to] keep an ear out for what people are saying and report it to their superiors", to spread fear and to stage "situations that will compromise us" (2005: 102). Finally, all these steps aim to "turn the whole nation into a single organization of informers" (102).

A man from the Ministry of the Interior asks Tomas to sign a made-up statement for the press, in which he expresses his love for the Soviet Union, his loyalty to the Party, and his so-called hatred for intellectuals. Tomas is thus pressed to lie about some journalists, and when he refuses to do so, he quits his job as a doctor and starts washing shop windows, roaming "the streets of Prague with brush and pole, feeling ten years younger" (121). Many other intellectuals are forced to change their profession, and work as taxi drivers or janitors. Others, like Sabina, who is a painter, choose an aesthetical indignation instead of an ethical position, expressing aversion to forms of Communist kitsch (such as 1 May celebration). Political kitsch is very obvious in the Great March, which annoys Franz – one of the few to actually notice the comical futility of marching.

Great History takes a toll on the individual, vulnerable histories. The political aspects are intertwined with meditations concerning human condition, in a style which reminds of parables:

> Human life occurs only once, and the reason we cannot determine which of our decisions are good and which bad is that in a given situation we can make only one decision; we are not granted a second, third, or fourth life in which to compare various decisions. History is similar to individual lives in this respect. There is only one history of the Czechs. One day it will come to an end as surely as Tomas's life, never to be repeated (138).

An individual forced into exile is actually forced into sadness: "A person who longs to leave the place where he lives is an unhappy person. That is why Tomas accepted Tereza's wish to emigrate as the culprit accepts his sentence, and one day he and Tereza and Karenin found themselves in the largest city in Switzerland" (20).

All the photos that Tereza takes of the Russian invasion could be regarded as an act of moral struggle of the self. The character needs to

confront the events, but also to let the world know about the aggression – the photos are then sent to foreign journalists: "Czech photographers and cameramen were acutely aware that they were the ones who could best do the only thing left to do: preserve the face of violence for the distant future" (43). Tereza captures a terrible "carnival of hate" in her photos. She feels that her identity and nationality are threatened: "As a result, a Czech spa had suddenly metamorphosed into a miniature imaginary Russia, and the past that Tereza had gone there to find had turned out to be confiscated" (103).

Caught between two terrifying options, real exile and internal exile, the characters oscillate between strength and weakness, resistance and compromise. They try to avoid losing their dignity and individual freedom by falling back on love and sexuality, which are turned into ways of escaping the politicized ordinary life. Every intimate experience softens the confusion and tension brought by the political atmosphere.

In *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, new narrative frames, alongside different narrative strategies such as counterpoint and polyphony become means of analysing and studying abstract concepts; these are associated with a series of keywords or "categories of existence". In Kundera's view, an individual could be haunted all his life by a particular word, belief or concept that eventually marks his whole destiny. In a metatextual manner, the narrator unveils the fictional threads behind a character's structure; for instance, Tomas believes in *einmal is keinmal*: "what happens but once might as well not have happened at all." The characters' genesis is exposed as means of linking reality to fiction, or better yet, of showing the way fiction is able to define a hazy feeling, sensation or belief: "It would be senseless for the author to try to convince the reader that his characters once actually lived. They were not born of a mother's womb; they were born of a stimulating phrase or two or from a basic situation. Tomas was born of the saying *Einmal ist keinmal*. Tereza was born of the rumbling of a stomach" (26).

Developing its themes in formal variations, the novel is substantially different from traditional ones: it combines mundane topics with abstract, philosophical ideas. Milan Kundera's novel explores both an intimate drama, regarding an effort to crystallize love, and a collective one caused by Great History – the installation of a totalitarian political regime. The two bear down on individuals and oblige them to reconsider their

private and social relationships, their fundamental experiences and their own views of the world they live in.

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Modernity and Postmodernity. Some Reflections

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Abstract

We tend to think that our understanding of the world around us is complete if we are looking at and listening to what is happening. As a matter of fact, many cultural, intellectual and ideological forces filter and shape it. This world that we have lived in for some time now is one in which words are punished to have no definite meaning but discourses are so powerful, where truth is doomed to lose any universal character but everyone is entitled to their own opinion regardless of their domain of expertise or simply experience (or lack thereof), where people can choose their religion but terrorist attacks or simply violent conflicts in the name of faith are on the news oftentimes. In such a world, at any level, authority is whoever happens to be in power with almost everyone deriding authority figures.

Keywords: *modernity, postmodernity, discourse, authority, power*

The author of the present brief piece of writing (meant to be postmodern of the lucid and ludic kind) will be dragging in all sorts of smart observations and interpretations along the way just to make it end up by being a little bit original, which is obviously impossible to achieve these days.

Actually, the term 'postmodernity' has come to wear down people nowadays. 'Wear' probably being an understatement, 'nauseate' seems more appropriate. When the term appeared back in the '70s many jaws fell and bounced off the floor several times as, for their owners, it was utterly inconceivable that anything could follow 'modernity', always associated with the idea of 'new' and 'now', and, if there were to be a period of anything following modernity, it would have to be called something other than 'modernity'. So it was called 'postmodernity', a name as good as any other, even the more so as it includes modernity as just another valid source of ideas.

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In real fact, postmodernity refuses to kill anything completely pledging its allegiance to a series of rules of thumb: "Look at the bigger picture. Zoom out. Don't focus in on two or three things to the exclusion of others. Keep everything in context. Pick your own fashions. Don't let someone else tell you what you should be or feel like. 'Tsall good."

Nevertheless, it seems weird and disorienting that, in our postmodern frame of mind, there is no truth, ideas do not matter, world issues are not the issue and no one takes almost anything seriously anymore. These would bother a modern, because a modern has to decide whether this or that is true because the modern believes in OR more than AND, whereas postmoderns believe in AND more than OR, or even better, in AND/OR.

Our culture has undergone a basic shift, one that might be considered healthy unless word for it. Furthermore, we make individual choices on the assumption that not everyone is going to agree, and that not everyone should be required to agree. We somehow traded our monoculturalism for the right to discuss things. Instead of being required to agree about everything, we are politely and politically correctly required to agree to disagree. Discussing things stimulates our tendency to 'deconstruct' the things we evaluate. Which brings us to deconstruction viewed as the bridge between modernism and postmodernism. The former, reductionist, tending to take things to pieces and then take one of the pieces in isolation and glorify it; the latter, holistic, trying to show all the pieces at once, and how they relate to each other. The former showing the final, great, shining product (a building, for example, as postmodernity began in architecture); the latter, letting visible the working (the ducts in the same example) and saying it is alright to be in the open, and it is alright for different things to look different. sometimes proves not to be so. We used to evaluate everything and everyone based on reputation or position, with the basic underlying assumption that we all had to agree whether something (or someone) was good or bad. It resulted in our feeling free to evaluate things and people based on what we think is good or bad rather than feel pressured to take someone's (famous)

Arrogant modernity focused on the hammer of reason and truth as the authority[1], pounding every nail (dysfunctional cultural/political/educational institutions), attacking every problem and by so doing creating other problems; postmodernity focused on the

carpenter, allowing him to choose whether or not to use hammers, granting him some amount of free will and creativity, even though sometimes the carpenter has no clue about what s/he is doing.

After many decades since postmodernity made its breaking-through appearance, with its ardent need to decenter/demolish the old and make large, comfortable (though not always), tolerant (though not really) otherness/difference-accepting room for itself, strangely enough, postmodernity seems to push us in the opposite direction.

In this line of thought, something that Professor Valentine Cunningham said a rather long while ago when discussing the legitimation of truth on the territory of literature and literary criticism stayed with me from a larger perspective:

> [o]nce discredited the idea of statements having a truth-value, or of the validity of truth leading to discussion on reality, imagination, fiction, etc., we obviously stumble… Once discredited the idea of the writer's duty to render truth the best he can, we come to an inevitable deadlock. Consequently, I think it is dangerous to mock at the idea that truth is a goal, be it in literature or criticism. Fortunately, most people guide their lives by other precepts and values than these… sceptics… (Cunningham in Anghelescu-Irimia, 1999: 120)

Many people, however, even running the risk of being scoffed at, aspire to truth and greatness, which is not wrong if both concepts are properly defined. True greatness, postmoderns claim, is measured by how much freedom you give to others, not by how much you can coerce others to do what you want. God is not a modernist. He does not view us as nails. God expects us to behave like carpenters. Indeed, he gave us a carpenter as an example. So maybe God is postmodern. He has his own ideas of what rules, and what does not, and he does not expect everyone to agree with him, although he probably likes it when people agree with him. God gives people the freedom to go to the devil if they so choose.

A price to pay for all the generous ideas and principles of postmodern ideology, on the other hand, is that a growing number, especially among the emerging generations, believe that reason and truth are inherently political and subversive. This is mainly why they are often so cynical: advised by voices in contemporary culture, including too many academics willing to make themselves visible as up-dated scholars, to

consider claims to truth as being clever disguises for the pernicious *will to power* (which too often are exactly that), they conclude that rather than dominating others with our version of reality, we should accept all beliefs as equally valid. Openness without the restraint of reason, and tolerance without moral appraisal seem, unfortunately, to be the new postmodern mandates. For too many, the postmodern outlook seems more absorbed rather than thought out. A vast majority came to believe and many of us even teach (in good will, of course) that truth is relative. But only few know why we think that way. Still fewer have any clue about how our beliefs practically relate to our own lives, that often they are hopelessly contradictory or that we often live inconsistently with them. In general, we tend to be ideologically confused rather than deeply committed to our convictions. So, while we hear the rhetoric of openness to everything and tolerance for everyone, it is rare to find someone who really understands what this means and even lives up to it. It has become the socially appropriate attitude to display. Thus, postmodern ideologues have been successful in transforming ideology into *popular zeitgeist*.

Paradoxically and ironically (if it were not sad), in an age of anti-dogmatism, this radical subjectivity leads to the dangerously arrogant inference that no one can ever be wrong about what they believe. As people living in a socially and morally fragmented age, free from the constraints of rationality, we are confronted with the danger of not knowing truth from self-delusion anymore. The tyranny of truth has been replaced with self-empowering stories typically functioning at the expense of truth: *authority as the truth rather than truth as the authority*.

Postmodernity is a moment of *cynical reason* in which subjects no longer believe the official line delivered by society's authorizing institutions; it is now taken for granted that governments routinely dissemble and that advertisers and entertainers perpetrate shams. But this disbelief does not bring with it a freeing from or resistance to ideology. Instead subjects respond according to the fetishistic logic of disavowal: "I know what I'm doing is meaningless, but I do it nonetheless."

Unlike its predecessor, there is something else that the postmodern can and has: make fun of themselves and humour. It is liberating to be who you really are not who you should be or the others want you to be; to be playful, mocking, nostalgic, sentimental, retro, casual, etc. It is entertaining and if postmodernity is not about entertainment it is about nothing at all.

Modernity meant being serious, which is not bad if you are not serious all the time about everything and anything. The moderns tried really hard to get rid of conventions and even though they did it. All they really did was make the conventions invisible, at least to themselves, building the cult of seriousness and objectivity to which the postmoderns answer with the cult of subjectivity, more honestly called 'cultural relativism'. It is the notion that everything is as good as everything else, because goodness is only a matter of opinion.

Beyond its disturbing, confusing, maddening characteristics, postmodernity may appear as a blessing since it offers with praiseworthy magnanimity a smorgasbord, the only question left being what you are hungry for. It asks all the questions without forcing anyone to come up with the answers. Somehow hypocritically, it claims that it is not the task of the philosopher, writer or scholar to act as the Big Other who tells us about the world, but rather to challenge our own ideological presuppositions. All of the three categories above, plus many others, depending on their life experience and domain of expertise and action, are called to criticize rather than try to find answers, which seems pretty comfortable after all if it were not, if misused and abused, deadly.

Any society needs people who are willing to be partisan on behalf of their chosen culture while remaining sufficiently non-partisan to keep in touch with the rest of the world. It is no fun to create a new culture and then cut it off from the rest of humanity. One good thing is that, in this respect, things have improved greatly, and the bridges across the gaps have got sturdier. Now people can send their memes across wider chasms without getting crucified on one end of the bridge or the other. It mirrors a postmodern sort of movement, with lots of diversity and a certain amount of turmoil, about as good as any movement gets nowadays. After all, we have agreed to agree. Except when we do not.

Yes, modernity fought against and also created a lot of dysfunction, no dispute about that. The interesting thing is that postmodernity is propagating the dysfunction because it actually finds its meaning in it. For one thing, we should not fail to notice how one cannot rebel by being dysfunctional any more. It is no longer interesting, we have done that already.

Postmodernity really is a result of modernity.

'Tsall good. Except when it's not.

Note

1. The Enlightenment praised the idea of progress believing that the application of universal reason to every human problem could help humanity move steadily toward the fully rational society in which there would be freedom, prosperity and happiness for all. Modernity exalted technological achievement and mastery over the natural order, planting the seeds of its own undoing (appalling wars, genocides, poverty, exploitation and injustice, pollution, threats of nuclear annihilation and other horrors of the twentieth century). Postmodernity claims that autonomous reason and technological proliferation have brought the modern age to the brink of disaster. Every time somebody claims to be in possession of *the* truth, it ends up repressing people. Consequently, postmodernists believe that what is wrong with modern ideologies is one part of humanity imposing its ideas and values and control over other parts, one nation imposing on another, or one group in society imposing its values on other groups.

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