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Editor's Note

The twelfth volume of *Cultural Intertexts* includes contributions by fifteen scholars from eleven countries around the world. The points of view adopted, developed and justified, though multiple, converge towards the idea that cultural texts are repositories of data pertaining to the spatial and temporal contexts they are generated by, revealing the mechanisms of formation, the strategies of dissemination and the practices of reception. Legend, folk tale, literary writing, film, hagiography, political discourse and photography are all brought centre front in significant case studies revolving around the notions of intertextuality and interculturality.

Aithihyamala (Garland of Legends) reflects, in Sabina Zacharias' opinion, the politics of rewriting history and the manufacturing of truths servient to local power structures. *One Thousand and One Nights* is read by Sima Aghazadeh as impacting the transnational crossroads and undergoing cultural transformation.

The literary ground covered includes twentieth-century novels and short stories, as well as contemporary poetic and prose texts: Robert Lance Snyder looks into the cultural relativism of Patricia Highsmith's *The Tremor of Forgery* (1969); Lidia Necula analyses geographical and mental displacement in Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* (1996); Francesca Pierini selects three short stories from A. S. Byatt's collection *Elementals: Stories of Fire and Ice* (1998) to illustrate discursive intertextuality; Mandy Beck focuses on the coexistence of the insular and the cosmopolitan in Brexit poetry signed Armitage, O'Brien, Clarke, Duffy and Commane; Ana-Maria Iftimie interrogates (re)fictionalization in Jude Morgan's *The Secret Life of William Shakespeare* (2012).

Film is addressed from the standpoint of adaptation, transformation and disfigurement – with reference to the Indian cinema landscape (by Sony Jalarajan Raj and Adith K Suresh) –, and individual productions are re-read (by Yidan Hu and Dina Pedro) as subverting happy endings and Victorian ideals of family – *The Piano* (1993) and *Barbe Bleue* (2009), and *The Irregulars* (2021), respectively.

Hagiographic works translated from Greek by Euthymius the Athonite are considered by Irakli Orzhonia in view of highlighting the function of their

intertext. The political discourse of the interwar Caucasian Union is tackled by George Gotsiridze to underline regional competing logic and geopolitical threat. War photography, in the context of the conflict in Ukraine, is approached by Eva Jonisová, who focuses on the trauma of warfare and the heavy price of wartime photojournalism. Lastly, the classroom as intercultural space is placed under the lens by Katherine Ruprecht, a Fulbright lecturer with Eastern European teaching experience.

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Michaela Praisler

One Thousand and One Nights at the Transnational Crossroads

Sima AGHAZADEH*

Abstract

One Thousand and One Nights - *also known in English as the* Arabian Nights - *is a compilation of folkloric tales, with anonymous author(s), dating as far back as the 14th or 15th century but assumed to be rooted much earlier, perhaps the 10th century in its Arabic version and even earlier in its lost Persian embodiment. This authorless work was introduced to the West first in the 18th and later in the 19th century by its French and English Orientalist translators by whom it was brought to life reborn in an alien environment with radically different perceptions and receptions. Since then, The Nights has become one of the most global and yet misunderstood works across various artistic versions besides literature. The narrative framework tells us tales that are widely varied and spread in various regions with their historical and cultural backgrounds, including Persia, Arabia, India, Egypt, China, and so on. On this account, this paper aims to highlight that the multiplicity and hybridity of voices, histories, and cultures position the work at a transnational crossroads. Without dismissing the Oriental aspects of the work, this paper emphasizes that the adaptation and appropriation of such an elusive work with a convoluted history cannot be discussed authoritatively (either through Western Oriental or Post-Colonial or Islamic perspectives) when there is no one author or manuscript or no one culture and nation as a reference point. Each translation or adaptation helps the work expand its transnational network, interconnect old and new, East and West together, bridge differences and continue to address the questions of cultural transformation.*

Keywords: *One Thousand and One Nights, transnational literature, Orientalism, cultural multiplicity, interconnection*

Introduction

The One Thousand and One Nights, also known in English as the *Arabian Nights,* is, without a doubt, an Oriental work that travelled to the West, went through complex and multiple processes of translation, adaptation, and appropriation and became a fertile ground for innumerable scholarly studies from different perspective [1]. In its original Arabic manuscript form, it is a compilation of oral folk tales, with anonymous author(s), written in the 14th or 15th century - but assumed to be rooted much earlier, perhaps the 10th century, in its Arabic version and even earlier in its lost Persian version

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(*Hazar Afsan* or *Thousand Tales*). Therefore, even the original manuscript is an adaptation from oral folklore into a written work, and obviously with no guarantee on the originality or accuracy of the tales. The original Arabic manuscripts branched off into main versions: "the Syrian & the Egyptian" (Haddawy, 1990: xii). According to Haddawy, the former is more authentic and homogenous; the latter more fluid with newer tales added by different writing hands from different sources.

The literary adaptation of *The Nights* (as will henceforth be referred to) in the West started with the 18th and 19th centuries translations; some drew from different Arabic manuscripts and some from the already existing translations. Since then, it has become one of the earliest and most popular narratives from the East to attract the West towards the Orient (e.g., Turkey, Persia, India, and Central Asia) as they appeared either as real or imaginary references in the stories. *The Nights* has been introduced, adapted, sometimes misreported and distorted, yet it has become the most popular global work. Subsequently, much energy and scholarly work have been spent investigating the originality and integrity of the different versions as well as the postcolonial attempt of Muslim researchers (e.g. Mahdi, 1984; Haddawy, 1990; Haddawy et al., 2010) to de-colonize the European versions. Both Orientalist and Postcolonial attempts at reviving this work have improperly ignored or undermined its multi-cultural and transnational element, failing to acknowledge that it is impossible to pin down the text to a single history or culture (Habegger-Conti, 2011).

After providing a short summary of the most popular versions of *The Nights* from the mentioned binary perspectives, this paper aims to highlight that the multiplicity and hybridity of voices, histories, geographies and cultures have been placing the work at the transnational crossroads since its inception. Without dismissing the Orientalist aspects of the work, it emphasizes that *The Nights* is an elusive work with a convoluted history. Therefore, it cannot be discussed authoritatively (neither from Western Orientalist nor Post-Colonial or Islamic perspectives) when there is not one single author or manuscript or one single culture and nation as a reference point. Each translation or adaptation helps the work expand its transnational network.

Caught in the binary opposition of Orientalism/Post-Colonialism

Among many attempts at translating *The Nights*, the 18th-century and the 19th-century versions are the most popular ones and the most frequently referred to [2]. The 18th-century French translation was done by Antoine Galland, who translated from the original but incomplete Syrian manuscript

that he could gather while travelling in the East, where he came to know several languages, such as Turkish, Greek, Arabic, and Persian. Galland's *Les Mille et Une Nuits* (*The Thousand and One Nights*) in twelve small volumes was first published in 1704 and focused more on the fantastic and adventurous, rather than the cultural elements of the tales but it also freely added many enduring stories such as 'Ali Baba' and 'Aladdin' that have made it difficult for the modern reader to believe that they were never part of the original text. For instance, Malcolm and Ursula Lyons's translation (2008) contains stories of 'Ali Baba' and 'Aladdin' which are from Galland's version. Research by Aboubakr Chraibi (2004) on specific stories such as 'Ali Baba', first found in Galland, and their possible origins have also been similarly and significantly revelatory. These additions reflect a good deal of Galland's imagination rather than his authenticity (Larzul, 2004). Galland's translation indeed counted for other eighty English translations of *The Nights* (Haddawy et al., 2010).

The first English translation appeared in 1706 and was applied to Galland's version. Being anonymous, it is known as the Grub Street edition. Edward William Lane (1801-1876), Britain's most famous scholar of the Middle East of his time, did one of the most popular translations in the 19th century, based on one of the Egyptian collections, called the Bulaq or the Cairo edition. He was fascinated by Egypt and Egyptian culture. Lane included in his translation intensive notes on the Middle Eastern and Muslim customs and replaced some of the fantasy-like elements by his 'truths' of 'the Orient' (Ahmed, 1978).

Sir Richard Burton (1821-1890), who also translated the Indian *Kama Sutra* into English, gave the next version of the translation of *The Nights* in ten volumes, with five additional volumes of explanatory notes. His translation is based on another Arabic edition known as Calcutta II (1839-42). He added ethnographic notes, mainly about sexual practices, as well as his own anthropological notes, full of imaginative embellishment and creativity, which altogether made it very much about himself more than the literary translation. Burton's over-emphasis on sexuality in his translation of *The Nights* is perhaps his criticism and revolt against Victorian sexual conservatism, yet it is considered as the translator's subjective response to his audience.

Lane's and Burton's versions contain supposedly anthropological, religious, and cultural 'truths' about Islam and the Arab World, yet the over-sexualized English versions plus the additional personal texts and footnotes have tainted *The Nights* in the inescapable Orientalist framework. What these two versions have done through the translators' comments is to relate *The*

Nights directly to Islam and Islamic traditions while the whole body of *The Night* has little to do with religion at all. Besides, they showcased it not as a marvellous work of literature from the East but as an anthropological work on the Middle East, in a clear attempt to extend European domination over the Orient, as Robert Irwin adequately states as "pretexts for their glosses or notes" (2004: xviii).

The wide range of adaptations and appropriations of *The Nights* across various artistic forms such as the visual arts, television, theatre, and specifically cinema apart from literature has placed it into the category of an 'Orientalist' work as defined by Edward Said (1995). Many critics, following Said's argument, claim that Western Orientalism as a "distorting medium' has seized upon the fictional stories of *The Nights* (e.g. Said himself; Coleman 2008; Irwin, 2004). Coleman states that *The Nights* stories, created by the Western Orientalists, "make up a purely imaginative geography of all those values which the West seeks to expel or disavow, such as irrationality, superstition, cruelty, sexual perversion, and effeminacy" (247). Similarly, the overestimated emphasis on fantasy and sex in different adaptations (esp. in visual adaptations) is a familiar pattern which associates the East (particularly Eastern women) to the world of superstition, mystery, sensuality, and of course erotica; and as a result, the West claims the superiority, rationality, and civilization as its own (Said, 1995).

In their attempt to promote a more faithful and authentic version of *The Nights*, two Arab scholars, Haddawy (1990) and Mahdi (1984) tried to purify and decolonize Burton's and Galland's versions and in doing so, by dismissing the earlier versions, they limited the narrative of *The Nights* to a unified and authoritative version. They both have gone to another extreme to claim the work as a part of Arab Nationalism while the original work contains and represents different layers of cultures, religions, and nationalities.

Muhsin Mahdi's *The Thousand and One Nights* (*Alf Layla wa-Layla*): *From the Earliest Known Sources* (1984) is his attempt at editing and publishing from the original manuscript but his focus is on additional commentary and textual history, as well as on critiquing the Orientalist versions, particularly Galland's translation. Therefore, he focuses more on the reconstruction of the Arabic original and sacrifices the artistic and narrative strength of the work for its postcolonial agenda.

Haddawy's English translation of *The Arabian Nights* (1990) claims to be the only authentic version based on the oldest manuscript of the story collection. He considers his translation as a careful mediator, using "colloquialisms and slang terms sparingly," and "literary ornament judiciously because what appealed to Arabic thirteenth- or fourteenth-

century literary taste does not always appeal to the taste of the modern English reader," and even cuts "the rhymed prose of the original because it is too artificial and too jarring to the English ear" (xxxi). This version is more the author's criticism of Burton's translation as "outlandish", "grotesque" and "totally alien both to the style of the Arabic original and to any recognizable style in English literature" (xxvi) by which he tries to declare his loyalty to a representation of a faithful original only. Therefore, Haddawy's attempt is another version of appropriation and sterilization of *The Nights*. Changing the fun rhyming puns of the original Arabic to a more self-consciously stiff and non-literary text appropriates the tales "under Islamic hegemony and as a more serious rendition" (xv).

Lane, Burton, Mahdi, and Haddawy have all brought *The Night* closer to its global prominence and popularity but at the same time, failed to see the essentially flexible and transnational nature of the work. Without dismissing the European interpolation and appropriation, it is also safe to say that without the French and English versions (though rightly placed as Orientalist), *The Nights* would be unlikely to have had the same successful response and influences in the world or might not have existed in the global mainstream literary list at all. What we know of *The Nights* today is the connection and interaction between the 14th-15th century Arabic compiled manuscripts, the 18th-century French translation, two very distinct 19th-century English versions among many others, around eighty Arabian Nights-inspired films, including Hollywood and Disneyland productions (Peterson, 2007), the Middle-Eastern scholarly research, and an endless list of artists and their works, intertextually influenced by the elements and characters of *The Nights*.

Caught between the two binary streams, most scholars and producers attempt to perceive and receive the work within their own perspective, overlooking that the work has always been hovering above flexible borders. *The Nights* is located in a truly transnational context without being fettered by one cultural, national, or ideological bias. In fact, the popularity and visibility of *The Nights* owe to its transnationality.

At the transnational crossroads

The Nights is inherently a transnational narrative and the collection of essays in *The Arabian Nights in Transnational Perspective* (2007) rightly proves it in the modern and postmodern discourse. It is predominantly transnational through its bringing stories from different cultures, geographies, and nationalities of its own time together. In so doing, it assimilates them in the world of imagination in a meta-fictional structure of stories within a story

and communicates freely its message(s) without obligation to any particular nation or religion. *The Nights* has truly been circulated beyond cultures and nations and become a part of world literature. Therefore, studying different textual versions of *The Nights* or even its representations on the screen or canvas should not overlook or undermine its transnational scope, which results from its hybrid multi-cultural and multi-lingual nature, invigorated by its narrative framework and the voice of its narrator, Scheherazade. These elements make *The Nights* fit in Schulze-Engler's definition of a transnational literary work as one which is impossible to relate to one "particular national literary space" and instead it contains "the complex articulations that link individual works of literature not only to local or regional modernity with their specific social, linguistic, and cultural constellations but also to the worldwide field of literature and specific forms of communicative interaction and political conflict engendered by it" (2009: xvi).

The frame story of *The Nights*, common in different versions, is the story of King Shahryar (a Persian Sassanid king) who, disgusted by his wife's and his brother's wife's infidelity, kills his wife and then, loathing all women, marries and kills a new wife each day. Having devised a scheme to save herself and other victims, Scheherazade (Vizier's daughter) volunteers to marry the king. Each night, she tells Shahryar a story, leaving it purposely incomplete and promising to finish it the following night. Scheherazade's power of storytelling amuses the king so that he eagerly puts off her execution from one day to the next (figuratively for a thousand and one nights) until he finally abandons his cruel plan.

Scheherazade offers a multiplicity of themes, characters, and voices from different geographies and religions in her tales. The elements, names, characters, and traditions are taken from Persians, Indians, Greeks, Egyptians and Turkish, and so on and are blended in the form of fluid and continuous or even indefinite tales, as stories within the frame story. Such cultural and linguistic hybridity gives the work a transnational feature long before the term was even coined or applied. As Geert Jan van Gelder, an Oxford professor of Arabic, comments, *The Nights* "illustrates the hybrid nature of the work; it is part of Arabic and European literature, it contains stories and motifs that may be traced to Sanskrit, Persian and Greek literature, it hovers between the oral and the written, the popular and the highbrow, the pious and the scabrous, realism and fantasy" (in Khan, 2014). Just to name a few examples of such hybridity of voices, are the narratives of: "The Christian Broker's Tale"; "The Jewish Physician's Tale: The Young Man from Mosul and the Murdered Girl"; "Stories of Harun Al-Rashid'; "The Barber of Baghdad" and "The Goldsmith and the Cashmere Singing Girl" [3].

As already said, the framework is structurally a story within a story. Some are left incomplete or even untold (e.g. the third man's story in "The Tale of the Merchant and the Demon") enveloped by the frame story. Such narrative devices like the cliff-hanger by which Scheherazade breaks her stories at critical points playfully situate *The Nights* in no beginning or ending but in an indefinite time; the tales simply continue presenting more richness and diversity in the range and dimensions [4]. Each night introduces a new tale and a narrative voice, though all fostered by the main narrator (Scheherazade), in a lineage of narrators. For example, in "The Tailor's Tale" she tells: 'I heard, O happy King, that the tailor told the king of China that the barber told the guests that he said to the caliph…' (Haddawy, 272) which, as just one example, indicates a heterogeneous range of voices and places. Each night, then, she starts her story with "I heard, O king…' which invokes Scheherazade as only the narrator/reciter of the tales in which she seeks refuge. Such framing and narrating style mobilizes the multiplicity and mixture of voices which has also been cited by Cooppan as "the heterogeneous mix of Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian cultures, and Arabic, Persian, Hebrew, Turkish, Syriac, and Byzantine Greek languages that constituted the cosmopolitan medieval world of *The Nights*" (2009: 35). One wonders how such a melting pot of a text can be labelled as of a single nation or culture!

Scheherazade herself is a transnational identity: bearing a Persian name, narrating in Arabic (in the existing Arabic versions) and displaying her tales from different nations and geographies. What shapes the core form of *The Nights* is Scheherazade's marrying King Shahriyar and telling him (and the reader) stories night after night, taking us not only to various and multiform tales but also to a deeper level of resistance, transformation, and liberation. In fact, the tales illustrate the living examples of humanity swarming on the streets of Baghdad and Cairo and Bukhara, strategically and sometimes satirically representing the world engaged with infidelity and corruption, and subsequently the inherently flawed kingdom. For example, playing with the theme of sexuality repeatedly, the narrator tries to suggest that sexuality repressed under the patriarchal civilization would result in a stifling form of corruption. The story of the adulterous affairs of the queen and her sister-in-law, the tale of "The Porter and the Three Ladies", "The Tale of the Husband and the Parrot" featuring a cheating wife, "The Tale of the Enchanted King" with a cheating wife who drugs her rich husband every night so she can sleep with her lover, the jinni's captive woman's call for sex are just a few examples of the representation of un-tabooed and unhindered sexuality and its problematic interactions in a

falsely constructed human world. Thus, Scheherazade's tales are in a way the comical or satirical version of the real world in which sexes, classes, and races are mingled in a subversive quest for freedom [5]. In short, the narrator's creative art of framing stories within a story with the multiplicity of themes, narrative voices and audiences, and the overall cultural hybridity display the transnational element of *The Nights*.

While *The Nights* does not really have a thousand stories (perhaps about 200 plus), one thousand and one suggests the infinity, boundlessness, and fluidity that cannot be contained within any authoritative structure. It signifies that the art of storytelling never ends, and neither does the strong narrative energy of the tales which accommodates the elusive diversity of voices. In today's world, *The Nights* is the property of both the Easterners and Westerners, of natives and immigrants, of the literal and the literary alike. It carries a multinational and multicultural backdrop, pushing the boundaries towards transnational flexibility and cultural hybridity.

Conclusion

The essence of this study is to add a deeper understanding and interpretation to *The Nights* in our current time. Its goal is to position the work in a literary transnational setting, with a more flexible representation of its nature. Considering different translations, adaptations, and appropriations of *The Nights* in both its Eastern and Western versions, it is too simplistic to study it as just a reproduction of binary opposition of Orientalism/Postcolonial revisionism.

Each adaptation is a possibility by which the text can engage the complexities and non-essentialist demands of cultural and artistic transformations. The stories of *The Nights* travel through texts. Perhaps with some changes to suit the taste of a particular audience or bearing a different political stamp, they get a new life and become an example of a transnational text par excellence. Looking at it from such perspective, both in creation and reception, helps us to un-tie the obsessive notion of difference and dissidence, and instead appreciate and respect the diversity of different and probably opposite cultures intersecting and encountering in its artistic creation and recreation. It is safe to claim that it foreruns the contemporary literary transnationalism.

Being truly transnational in nature, *The Nights* seems more alive and inspiring in our era. Undeniably, we need more of Scheherazade's liberating voice, of the flying carpet, and of the magic password of 'open sesame' to seek refuge away from the current world of wars, isolation, oppression, and injustice into border-crossing imaginaries. The intertextuality of the Eastern

and Western versions of *The Nights* is a reminder of empathy towards an idea of a more interconnected world. This study wishes to highlight that *The Nights* is still an inexhaustible source of inspiration for artists and audiences from different backgrounds. The One-thousand-and-one-night recreated textual versions or screen adaptations help the work remain at the transnational crossroads, connect old and new, bridge differences of different kinds, and continue to address the questions of cultural transformation even after a thousand and one years in its figuratively infinite number as suggested by its title.

Notes

[1] For a history of the text of *The Nights* and the differences in its translations, see Frost (2001), available online. Also see Wikipedia entries under the *Arabian Nights* or *The Thousand and One Nights*.

[2] Other major translations from Arabic originals into English by several well-known translators include Jonathan Scott (1811), Henry Weber (1812), Edward William Lane (1890), John Payne (1901), Sir Richard Francis Burton (1900), Andrew Lang (1898), N. J. Dawood (1950s), Husain Haddawy (1990), E. Powys Mathers (1996), and Malcolm & Ursula Lyons (2008).

[3] Taken from Burton's translation of *Arabian Nights*.

[4] See Makdisi & Nussbaum (2008); Robert Irwin (2004)

[5] Scheherazade represents a liberal and empowering feminist voice which subverts the cultural rigidity of her time and the patriarchal system (reflected in the cruelty and insanity of King Shahryar). Scheherazade's voice and narrative strategies are beyond the scope of this paper and would deserve a full article.

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The Island Nation and Euroscepticism: Revisiting Europe's Heritage in Brexit Poetry

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Abstract
The idea of "Britain and Europe" that David Cameron emphasised in his speech on 23 January 2013 is a curious one – it evokes a shared history full of intricate twists, which spans over several centuries, and at the same time, preserves the apparent incompatibility of the island nation and the continent. Cameron even proposed an "in-out referendum" to determine the future of the British people, and its realisation in 2016 made Brexit an unexpected reality and signifies a crucial setback in the recent history of the European project. Brexit is furthermore an expression of "a perceived cultural distinction between Britain and Europe" (Spiering 2015) that seems to persist in British discourse specifically.

The paper thus uses Menno Spiering's concept of "British Euroscepticism" (2004), a unique form of Euroscepticism in terms of history, politics and culture, to discuss the cultural aspects of British differentness as entailing not only an opposition to Europe but also a potential to reflect on shared values and experiences. Based on this, the paper will trace the presentation of Europe in contemporary literature that emerged as a reaction to Brexit, especially poetry by Simon Armitage, Sean O'Brien and David Clarke, to ascertain the British perspective on the continent as either the paradigmatic Other or a constituent part for defining British identity.

Keywords: *Euroscepticism, Brexit, Brexit literature, contemporary poetry*

Introduction

In his now well-known EU speech at Bloomberg on 23 January 2013, David Cameron emphasised the idea of "Britain and Europe", which is a term commonly used by the British, but also a combination that might seem curious to the rest of Europe. With this idea, Cameron evoked a shared British-European history of several centuries, which is full of intricate twists and complex shifts, and at the same time affirmed the apparent incompatibility of the island nation and the continent. In so doing, he reframed the much debated political and economic UK-EU relationship, which was the original topic of his speech, in a dichotomy of Britain on the one end and Europe on the other. The reason why Britain should be seen as somehow separate from

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Europe, hence the United Kingdom as essentially different from the other member states of the European Union, is justified by Britain's geography and "British sensibility" (2013). In hindsight, it seems rather logical that Cameron's speech would culminate in the proposition of an "in-out referendum" (2013) to determine the future of the British people, albeit with a warning of the possible consequences of an exit.

The realisation of the referendum and the UK's actual decision to leave the EU three years later in 2016 made Brexit an unexpected reality, and undoubtedly constitutes one of the most crucial setbacks in the recent history of the European project. It is also an expression of "a perceived cultural distinction between Britain and Europe" (Spiering 2015a: 3) that persists in British discourse specifically. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to outline the reasons for this (self-)perception that stems from what Menno Spiering has called "British Euroscepticism" (2004: 127). The latter is itself embedded in culture, which can both function as a source that causes differentiation as well as a means to reflect on the bonds between Britain and Europe. To be more precise, this paper seeks to analyse the concept of Europe in the context of Brexit literature (i.e. texts that deal with topics surrounding the UK's exit), particularly in poetry, to determine whether the continent is indeed represented as the paradigmatic Other (e.g. Spiering 2020; Colley 1992) or rather as an integral part for defining British identity.

British Euroscepticism

Contrary to what David Cameron's aforementioned speech might suggest, the dichotomy between "Britain and Europe" that is predominantly perceived by the British is not an entirely new or recent one. In fact, its dissemination as a transparent cultural and political notion began at least in the 1990s, although it perpetually surfaced in the British consciousness during and after Europe-related crises, such as the Great War, the Second World War, or the post-war period (Spiering 2004: 127; Reynolds 2019: 56). And while Britain admittedly "has a long history of not identifying with things European" (Spiering 2015a: 6), the situation changed significantly with the emergence of Euroscepticism in the 1980s under Margaret Thatcher's premiership that added to the UK's problematic standing in Europe, but particularly in the European Union. According to Anthony Forster, "the term Euroscepticism has been employed as a generic label that defines a negative point of view towards the European Union (EU)" (2002: 1-2) and refers to a form of resistance to European integration. This manifested itself with the speeches by Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell in 1962 about "Britain's non-European identity" (Reynolds 2019: 56) as well as by

Margaret Thatcher [1] in Bruges in 1988 and gained momentum with the rise of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) since 2013 when Euroscepticism became a political campaign that was directed against the EU.

What is noteworthy about the United Kingdom is that it was said to be "amongst the most Eurosceptic countries in the EU" (Halikiopoulou and Vlandas 2018: 444) decades before Brexit and that this type of Euroscepticism is distinct from that of other European countries. As Menno Spiering further argues:

> In Britain, the tendency to see Europe as an undifferentiated "abroad" is deeply ingrained. As of the sixteenth century in the English language the terms "Europe" and "European" began to be used also to denote an outside, even alien entity, reflecting a growing national trend to contrast the English (or British) with "the Europeans" […]. What is special about the British case is that one of these out-groups is, and has been for a long time, the Europeans *en masse*. In other European countries, such a differentiation makes no sense (2004: 144-45, italics in original).

Notwithstanding the fact that negative attitudes towards the EU are not uncommon among its member states, this specific line of thought is what ultimately constitutes "British Euroscepticism" (ibid.), which involves two opposing identities – the British and the European – as well as defining Europe as the Other. National identity can hence be seen as partially deriving from an *us* vs. *them* binary opposition and "a discourse of differentness" (Spiering 2020: 126). This discourse, as indicated by Spiering, has historical origins and multiple implications. While not all of them can be delineated here, there are some major historical and political developments worth mentioning. There was, for example, the continent's Catholic dominance (especially of Spain and France) that contrasted the rise of Protestantism on the island from the sixteenth century onwards; French and Irish invasions in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries caused persistent tensions between the countries; the configuration of Great Britain as an entity (by incorporating Scotland in 1707 and later Ireland in 1801) reinforced the idea of the island nation; the establishment of the USA as a close ally during the two world wars as well as the loss of the Empire and Britain's search for a new role in the mid-twentieth century promoted a globally orientated perspective instead of a European one; and finally, devolution increased the focus on national identity in England since the 1990s, which fuelled English exceptionalism (Reynolds 2019: 65-71; Spiering 2015a: 5, 26) [2]. As a result, Britain viewed itself as opposed to rather than connected to Europe. Moreover, in the second half of the twentieth century,

the image of Europe as the EEC and then the EU became ingrained into the British psyche, which spurred historical stereotypes relating primarily to the founding members France and Germany [3]. Overall, this means that Britain had had an uneasy standing within the EEC/EU from the very start due to various factors.

Additionally, populist and post-truth discourses contributed to the perceived distance between the island and the continent by intensifying Euroscepticism even further in the last few years. Massimiliano Demata, for example, maintains that "Populist movements in Europe have expanded in the last decade or so mainly because of a widespread sense of distrust towards the EU and the individual national political establishments" (2019: 124). In the case of Britain, the EU was often portrayed by the media [4] or certain political parties and politicians as an institution of the political "elite", which had lost the sense of the "general will" of "the people" (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017: 6, 18). For this reason, British populists (whether right-wing like Nigel Farage and Boris Johnson, or left-wing like Jeremy Corbyn) used Eurosceptic attitudes in order to promote their political agenda and simultaneously presented themselves as the real spokesperson for "the people", who had thus far not been represented properly or were not able to act as "sovereign" – even though the notion of "the people" itself is questionable in general (9-10).

Another point is that within populist discourses, similar mechanisms of othering that Spiering mentions in the context of "British Euroscepticism" are applied, because "the [political] establishment" and everyone not belonging to the "true people" from a nationalist perspective (i.e. foreigners, immigrants, refugees, etc.) are created as out-groups (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017: 34; Wodak 2017: 554-556). This, however, is an oversimplification of heterogenous societies on the basis of entirely different aspects, such as social or ethnic origins, skin colour, or religion, and easily leads to an exclusion of certain persons in order to confirm the identification of the in-group. Within "British Euroscepticism" such forms of othering encompass a hierarchical level as well: "The Other defines the Self by being unequal, sometimes unthreateningly so (in the sense of being exotic, strange and wonderful), but mostly the Other is regarded as inferior, and a possible menace to the own identity" (Spiering 2015a: 22-23). Accordingly, UKIP, for example, focused on immigration in an exaggerated and xenophobic manner during the Leave campaign and blamed the EU for being too elitist, arrogant and bureaucratically complex to find simple solutions for the fears of the British people (Rowinski 2021: 149f.; Startin 2018: 461).

Yet, the previously described "oppositional thinking" (Spiering 2015a: 23) towards Europe also decisively effected British nation-building from the eighteenth century onwards, because "Europe provided a kind of unity and cultural cohesion to an otherwise heterogeneous United Kingdom", so much so that even the British constitutional debate was "Europeanis[ed]" (Stolz 2020: 89, 92) over decades in the late twentieth century. Recently, the Scottish referendum in 2014 and, more clearly, the Brexit referendum laid bare an internal division of the island towards European integration (95), but the perception of Europe as the Other nevertheless remains. This is furthermore based on a paradox of British Euroscepticism, namely that Europe appears simultaneously "as a non-diverse monolith" from which Britain distances itself and also as "an extremely diverse collection of nation states", which can hardly be combined into a European whole (Spiering 2015b: 31). Even though in both views the idea of "Europe as an external entity" (31) becomes difficult to uphold, its cultural relevance can also be traced in art and literary texts. In the following, the discussion will therefore turn to literature that developed in the context of Brexit to explore the present sense of Europe as the Other and to re-evaluate the shared British-European history and cultural heritage.

Brexit poetry

The impact of the referendum in 2016 and the UK's actual exit in 2020 (with a withdrawal agreement reached in January 2020 and a transition period until January 2021) is far from merely economic, political, social, or historical – it also has a strong cultural dimension, which reveals itself in a new set of texts called "Brexlit" (Shaw 2018, 2021). Ever since Brexit became an option, literary responses by well-known writers like Ali Smith, Jonathan Coe, Ian McEwan or Carol Ann Duffy in fiction and drama to "the causal factors and motivating impulses of Brexit" (Shaw 2021: 3) appeared continuously. Added to this is the emergence of more or less new writers, such as Olivia Lang, Anthony Cartwright or Sam Byers, who receive attention because of their novels that deal with Brexit's implications. By now, a large number of texts has been published which can be attributed to the "Brexlit" genre, but scholarly research on this phenomenon is relatively scarce or still evolving. Especially in the case of Brexit poetry, little has been thoroughly analysed and discussed (e.g. Cosslett 2019; Klepuszewski 2021; Varty 2018; Wheatley 2018), because poetry is considered marginal in comparison to the novel as *the* medium to depict "existing cultural imaginaries and patriotic attachments" (Shaw 2021: 3) in Britain.

The present paper, however, intends to show the significance of poetry within the literary discourse on Brexit due to its ability to represent complex subjects with sharpness, brevity, imagery, and lucidity. Thus, the main question of the subsequent analysis is whether Brexit poetry draws a different image when it comes to Europe, i.e. does it avoid European issues and concentrate mostly on Britain like the rest of Brexlit, as Jon Day maintains (2017)? And is British Euroscepticism part of the overall perspective in the poems?

In contrast to "Brexlit" fiction, which has already been divided into subgenres, such as political or intimate (Day 2017), satirical/dystopian, testimonial/verbatim or realist/panoramic (Zwierlein and Rostek 2019), Brexit poetry has not been classified yet. Wojciech Klepuszewski offers a general distinction between poems written by professional writers and by the public (2021: 158-159), which is often circulated online via social media or blogs and gives voice to public opinion in a less sophisticated style. Carol Ann Duffy, Simon Armitage, Andrew Motion and Sean O'Brien are among the established writers who commented on Brexit early on and, as Poets Laureate (except for O'Brien), their texts have considerably more cultural impact. Andrew Motion's poem "After the EU referendum: In the Air" (2016), for example, captures the atmosphere of uncertainty and a sense of disbelief after the Brexit vote with an interesting analogy between history and an albatross: "History flies onward like the lonely albatross […] / riding the wind until it decides enough / is enough and lands roughly where it pleases" (l. 13-16). The witty comparison at the end brightens the melancholic mood of the four stanzas. Still, the perspective of Motion's speaker is introspective, rather turning towards his country and observing the British from a bird's eye view than looking outside.

"The Brink" by Simon Armitage (2019: 151-164) operates in another way. The poem is determined by constant movement, as the speaker travels by train to the South-East of Britain. The journey through Kent is described in short and erratic snapshots of observations, thoughts, scenes and memories, because the text was originally written as a film script for the Art 50 project (197), and the presence of Europe on the other side of Dover pervades many stanzas. In the beginning, there is a list of European cities, then of languages, philosophers, soccer players, musicians, and food. The speaker also remarks that "You're keeping your baggage with you at all times" (151), as if not only referring to suitcases but on a broader level to the cultural (European) baggage that Britain carries with it no matter where it goes after leaving the EU. There are, furthermore, references to the referendum in terms of the European flag (155), outspoken Brexiteers (161)

or EU-related word plays (160), which are textually embedded in descriptions of everyday situations in a calm but critical tone. In sum, the structure of the poem gives the impression that it is less about a train ride through the scenic attractions of the South-East (i.e. affirming national stereotypes of the beautiful English countryside) but more about confronting oneself with the themes of leaving the EU and the partial loss of one's cultural heritage. An attachment to Europe is clearly carried across in the rapid line breaks. The poem's title itself derives from the island's geographical proximity to the continent: "Kent – where the country looks over the edge, / waits on the brink. / Is that Europe on the other side?" (159). "The Brink" is thus one example of literary response to Brexit that focuses on the bonds between Britain and Europe instead of on Eurosceptic tendencies.

Sean O'Brien dedicates a whole series of poems to this topic in his 2018 collection, which is significantly called *Europa*. The language choice of the German *Europa* is interesting since it indicates both a deep-rootedness of Europe in the UK's history but also Germany's pre-eminence in the EU. At the same time, one is inevitably reminded of the famous Greek myth about Zeus transforming into a bull to steal away Europa. There are even more intertextual references to Homer or Ovid and to other stories of mythological figures in the poems, as will be shown below.

The collection opens with "You Are Now Entering Europa", where Brexit is merely implied but imminent (Beck 2021: 210-211). It threateningly closes in on the speaker (a poet) in the form of grass that is moving and growing everywhere: "The grass is in the street, […] / Is at the door, is on the stairs, / Is in my room, my mouth, is me" (O'Brien 2018: 1, l. 10-16). While grass might be an unusual metaphor for something negative and alarming, it illustrates how the ordinary can suddenly become uncanny due to an unexpected twist – similar to the situation in the summer of 2016. This is connected to the central paradox of the poet's work, which is "So near to its conclusion now / That I will never finish it" (l. 13-14), meaning it is somehow entirely futile to write, to act or to continue. O'Brien here describes the emotional aftermath of the vote: there is coldness and dreariness (l. 1-6), but above all hopelessness. The speaker, however, does not give up in the end. In an act of resistance, he concludes: "How blest I am, to have my work, / To tend the graveyard I become" (l. 18-19). This can also be read as a statement against a further estrangement of the UK towards the EU (Beck 2021: 211).

The subsequent poem "Dead Ground" proceeds with the grass-motif and the prevailing mood of change and uncertainty (O'Brien 2018: 2-4).

Additionally, O'Brien deconstructs national symbols and cultural items of Britain, itself an "imaginary country" (l. 12), to demonstrate that a lot about it is illusive and artificial. Reading this in the context of British Euroscepticism, the core identity, or "Self" in Spiering's words, turns out to be empty and this prompts the question if there is actually a genuine British culture: "The never-was and never-will, / Where ownership is all there is. / You are yourself possessed, / Except you call it geography […]" (l. 40-43). What follows is an almost accusing enumeration of examples about misleading beliefs of cultural dominance, which is surely directed towards the British (or especially Brexiteers) themselves, and a warning about the devil who "sits / Enthroned on smoking ash / To count the takings" (l. 52-54). This again exemplifies O'Brien's aptness with metaphorical allusion but makes the overall criticism not less apparent.

A similar attitude can be found in the poem "The Chase", where a derelict roadhouse becomes a symbol of the British nation's state after the referendum: "It fell on hard times, then on harder ones / And kept falling through false floors" (O'Brien 2018: 6, l. 6-7). The polyptoton of "hard" and the consonance of "fell", "falling", "false floors" across the lines intensify the impression that mistakes have been made for a long time, but there will be no solution. Besides the omnipresent debris and decay in every stanza, the past British glory is also completely gone. Consequently, the speaker says: "What began / One pale late summer evening here / Will end when darkness brings instructions / To prepare for the eternal Soon" (l. 25-28) – or in other words, what began on 23 June 2016 will end when there is a Brexit deal and the UK's withdrawal is put into effect. In any case, the outcome will not be positive for Britain, which is suggested repetitively in the collection, for example, in "Away You Go", "Exile" and "World's End" (O'Brien 2018: 9, 15, 47). In the latter, the world comes to an end with a "step into the dark" (O'Brien 2018: 47, l. 18) that is symptomatic of Britain's role after Brexit. A lot of it is unclear and yet there is an anticipation of the worst, since British Euroscepticism encourages rejection and isolation of its geographically closest international partner [5].

Apart from reflecting on the origins and consequences of Brexit on the British side, a second major thematic strand in O'Brien's *Europa* are the long-lasting cultural ties to Europe. In fact, they seem to be the more important issue, with which he deals poetically. Undoubtedly, "Zorn" (German for "anger" or "rage") (O'Brien 2018: 5) stands out in this section of poems because of its resonance of Homer's *The Iliad*. It is a kind of rewrite of "The Rage of Achilles" with regard to the present situation:

> Somewhere in the house, I howl.
> Of this much I am certain, though
> These days I no longer hear (O'Brien 2018: 5, l. 1-3).
>
> Rage-Goddess, sing the rage of Peleus' son Achilles,
> murderous, doomed, that cost the Achaeans countless losses,
> hurling down to the House of Death so many sturdy souls, […] (Homer/Fagles 1990: 77).

In both texts, the initial lines depict the emotional intensity of rage and its destructive force. They also mention a house. Homer refers to the "house of death" (i.e. Hades to which Achilles sends a lot of souls). O'Brien is more ambiguous, but later adds: "It's me again, […] / Sealed between these walls, a howling / Absence of the sort you often find / In older houses such as this" (l. 20-24), which creates a connection to the speaker, who is both everywhere and simultaneously not there. Thus, the unspecified speaker embodies the essence of the feeling itself that uncontrollably spreads around an old house, which likely stands for Europe. In short, there is an atmosphere of anger in Europe (pro-European Britons included) as a response to the referendum, which O'Brien equates with Achilles' fierce and murderous fighting skills. Rage functions in both texts as a central trope, a *pars pro toto* for an unstoppable force. Once it is unleashed, or once Brexit is set in motion, the consequences will be dramatic. Nevertheless, O'Brien uses *The Iliad* not only to oppose Brexit, since Troy eventually cannot prevent its own destruction, but to emphasise the relevance of the shared history of Britain and Europe: "history, / A word we'd long supposed / Was exiled to the snowfield itself" (l. 10-12).

What is more, he invokes all kinds of myths and tales in his poems – either of destruction or of being out of touch with reality. Dark forces can be found in "Translation" or "Apollyon" (O'Brien 2018: 10, 25), which is the Greek name of an apocalyptic archangel and literally means "destruction". Backwardness, on the other hand, pervades "Signs and Wonders" (12), which alludes to the old British children's show *The Rubovian Legend* about a place in Europe where the people are stuck in the past century and magic still works, or "Hence, Loathèd Melancholy" (23) with its reference to the British Harlequinade, a humorous theatre performance that originated in Italy. These contrasting stories underline the European literary tradition, which is abundant and multi-layered. O'Brien also effortlessly incorporates the main European languages, German, French, Italian and Spanish, in the collection to demonstrate his awareness of British-European history on a linguistic level. Consequently, *Europa* should be read as a book about Europe

and against Euroscepticism, because, besides its critical stance on Brexit, it is a celebration of the continent's many sides and its lasting influence on Britain. As a result, it seems that Britain and Europe are not that different, even though there are different cultures. In the follow-up collection *It Says Here* (2020), O'Brien continues the main elements of *Europa* and elaborates the significance of history, especially in the ten cantos of "Hammersmith" (O'Brien 2020: 23-66), where past and present often blur.

As an example of a younger generation of poets who occupy themselves with Britain and Europe after Brexit, one should mention David Clarke. His book *The Europeans* is "a comparative cultural analysis, a social satire and political commentary, a portrait of us and them, here and there, home and away", as Paul Stephenson accurately writes in his review (Clarke 2019). The first poem "Invitation" (9) is about "the Hotel Europa" – the German version of the word and the introduction of the setting being quite similar to O'Brien's "You Are Now Entering Europa" – where the speaker reflects on Europe's idiosyncrasies from a British perspective in a playful manner: "Meet me in the lobby of the Hotel Europa, / the high lobby shadowed by palms, / where men in uniform stride with stiff / purpose and the pianist gifts us bland jazz" (l. 1-4). It is a place that is full of history and hidden surprises, though its gradual "obsolescence" (l. 35) cannot be denied. The hotel welcomes everyone like a haven, but the speaker finally realises: "And if we've ever cause to quit the Hotel Europa, / let us not be consumed by recrimination / and regret. Call it a dream, / a happy accident. If you must, a lie" (l. 37-40). Formulated like a request, or an invitation in view of the poem's title, to separate in mutual agreement these last lines cannot be but a wish – politically at least, since the referendum's outcome or the Brexit negotiations afterwards occasionally lead to absurd accusations on the UK's and the EU's part, which will have a lasting effect on the prospective relationship. Yet, the end of the poem is also directed at the Britons and Europeans, inviting them to remember their historic bond and the benefits of cultural exchange.

The same is true for the poem "The Europeans" (Clarke 2019: 14), which again presents them from a British perspective. The speaker characterises their behaviour, appearance and habits in witty descriptions: "The Europeans were volatile or taciturn, hearty / or shiftless. Really, you could take your pick" (l.13-14). They are obviously not the monolithic group of people that Eurosceptics would want them to be (Spiering 2015b: 31). Additionally, the historic weight of crucial events and wars can be felt, or literally be touched, everywhere in Europe: "In their cities, / the streets were museums. Someone had been shot / heroically on every corner. You could

still put your finger / into the bullet holes in the masonry, […]" (l. 16-19). This is a gripping visualisation of the past's impression on the presence. Apart from this, there is a reference to the European literary tradition as well (l. 20-21) like in O'Brien's texts. Both poets weave European features into their collections explicitly and implicitly. In sum, Clarke's *The Europeans* is in line with O'Brien's *Europa* in its orientation towards the continent, albeit in a lighter tone, and not focussing exclusively on Britain or the failure of Brexit. This marks the current trend in Brexit poetry and attests to the genre's distinctiveness, which is why some tentative conclusions can already be drawn about poetic "Brexlit".

Conclusion

Britain and Europe share a long, powerful history and a cultural heritage, which cannot be overlooked – or to put it in David Cameron's words: "We have helped to *write* European history, and Europe has helped *write* ours" (2013, emphasis added). And as this paper has argued, it is literally written and re-written in form of contemporary poetry, which reacts to Brexit and, more importantly, scrutinises British Euroscepticism. According to Menno Spiering, the UK would not have been able to define itself as being unique within but also supposedly independent from Europe (or the EU) without perceiving it as the Other or the continental culture in direct contrast to the island mentality. However, rapprochement with Europe and cultural reconciliation arise in the literary texts which have been previously discussed. In the poems by Simon Armitage, Sean O'Brien and David Clarke, Europe and Britain are not presented as two distinct entities – even though the British perspective is still somehow set apart from the European, an oppositional thinking seems to have been overcome, after Brexit worsened the internal division of the UK.

Can Brexit poetry, therefore, be termed "political"? The poems are definitely political in that their creative inspiration derives from political events and their style is far from neutral. But to classify them as merely political (Day 2017) would disregard the poets' literary achievements in the collections. Broadly, this type of poetry can be classified as introspective (i.e. concerned with the reasons and impact of Brexit) on the one hand, and outward-looking (i.e. returning to the European culture in search of common ground, yet not in the sense of an overall "cosmopolitanism" in "Brexlit" (Shaw 2018: 16)), on the other. The latter specifically employs Europhile elements and intertextual references to culture, literature, history, etc. to highlight that British identity is intertwined with European identity. Other writers like Carol Ann Duffy with *Sincerity* (2018) or Jane Commane with

Assembly Lines (2018) can be counted among those who combine these two strands as well. Structurally, the poems typically use run-on lines, also over stanzas, to connect the seemingly disconnected parts again. To conclude, Brexit poetry attempts to counterbalance the predominance of Eurosceptic tendencies in public and political discourse by revisiting Europe's heritage.

Notes

[1] In her speech, Thatcher expressed her doubts about the European project with regard to sovereignty and ideological aspects: "We have not successfully rolled back the frontiers of the state in Britain, only to see them re-imposed at a European level with a European super-state exercising a new dominance from Brussels. Certainly, we want to see Europe more united and with a greater sense of common purpose. But it must be in a way which preserves the different traditions, parliamentary powers and sense of national pride in one's own country; for these have been the source of Europe's vitality through the centuries" (Thatcher 1988).

[2] There are a number of works, which provide a detailed overview, e.g. Stevens (2021); Tournier-Sol and Gifford (2015); Tombs (2021).

[3] France, a major antagonist in the past centuries, vetoed the UK's application for the EEC twice in the 1960s. Within the newly founded community, the image of Germany, formerly responsible for the horrors of the Second World War, soon started to be replaced by that of a powerful and united Germany, which led to growing anxiety on the British side in the 1980s (Reynolds 2019: 97, 101).

[4] In this regard, it is important to note that British media is mostly Eurosceptic and disseminates this kind of discourse further (e.g. Daddow 2015).

[5] Oppermann, Beasley and Kaarbo argue convincingly that the United Kingdom will probably end up in an isolationist role in terms of foreign policy after Brexit created a "role crisis" (2020: 145).

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On the Issue of the Caucasian Union in the 1920s-1930s

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Abstract
The paper analyses the futile attempts of the political elites of the independent Caucasus states created at the end of the First World War (Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and the Mountainous Republic of the Northern Caucasus) to create the united Caucasus during their presence in power and then in political emigration in the 1920s and 1930s, and also the attitude of influential European politicians towards this matter. The merits of the 'main dreamers' fighting for the integrity of the Caucasus – Akaki Chkhenkeli, Ali Mardan Bek Topchibashev, and Haidar Bamatov (Bamat) – have been outlined. The article discusses the factors that created fertile ground for the existence of their dream, on the one hand, and examines the real circumstances and objective reasons that hindered the realization of the ideas and actions of the historical figures working in the period under the lens. The work emphasises that, despite separate impediments (especially disagreement over boundaries and the annexationist policy of Turkey and Russia), the idea of Caucasian unity in the 1920s was based on the solid background created by the three main cultures that coexisted harmoniously over the centuries: 1. Religion - Judaism, Christianity, Islam; 2. Caucasian rule of thinking and 3. Caucasian mentality. Based on the research, we conclude that the happy future of the Caucasian people is linked to the unity of the Caucasus as it was in the case of the European Union.

Keywords: *Caucasian Union, Caucasus elite, Caucasian mentality, Caucasian people*

Introduction

Although the Caucasus Confederation failed, the issue does not lose its actuality, given that, based on critical analysis of their own subjective mistakes or objective circumstances, the Caucasian political elite of the 1920-30s realized within a few years the difficulty of the existence of independent Caucasian states and close cooperation without a joint response to the external threats, and formally stated the need to form a confederation after the restoration of independence by the Caucasian states. This should be a lesson for the current political elite of the Caucasus countries. The situation created after the collapse of the Soviet Union seems to resemble the events going on a century ago. The political reality created in the South Caucasus

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today is a reminiscence of the situation of the previous century and is distinguished by the abundance of historical parallels.

In the preface to Firuz Kazemzade's famous study 'The Struggle for Transcaucasia, 1917-1921', Mikhail Karpovich, a Harvard University Professor born in Tbilisi and the founder of Russian studies in the United States, stressed in 1950 the importance of the aforementioned book, while expressing his hope that Transcaucasia would once again become an important scene of international life and that knowledge of history lessons would allow us to avoid the pitfalls, should the complexity of events in the Caucasus in the 1920s still be a problem. "This equally refers to the nations living in the region, which in the future will have to build the relations with each other, as well as to foreign states that will try to influence these processes," added the historian (2016: 15-16). That is why understanding the past, in the modern geopolitical context, has special political significance along with pure cognition. Russia is still trying to regain influence over the former Soviet republics and the countries of the socialist camp.

Discussion

As a result of the conquests and the wars between Iran and the Ottoman Empire from the beginning of the 19th century, the whole Caucasus was united under the Russian throne, which existed within the empire in the form of different administrative units at different times until 1917. The bourgeois revolution in February 1917 and the subsequent October coup led to substantial changes in the organization of the Caucasus. In fact, the process of its separation from the centre began despite the subjective aspirations of the public strata of this side and the influential political parties, which mainly supported the idea of Russian unity and patiently awaited the Constituent Assembly. After the recall of the Constituent Assembly by the Bolsheviks in January 1918, the attitude of the latter towards the issue changed, and the process of secession of the Caucasus from Russia took, in fact, an irreversible look. At the same time, this process was greatly influenced by the states involved in the First World War. If the countries of the Triple Entente considered the Caucasus as part of the "Russian issue" and regarded the assistance of the *de facto* Transcaucasian government as a temporary event before the defeat of the Bolsheviks in Russia, the Central Powers facilitated the secession of the Caucasus from Russia. The latter, relying on Lenin's principle of the right of nations to self-determination, sought to thwart his demand for annexed peace and to make the territorial concessions too necessary for them by establishing new

independent states from the Baltic to the Black Sea and establishing their protectorate (Gotsiridze 2009: 157).

For this purpose, on January 3 (16) 1918, along with other peoples of the former Russian Empire, the Central Bloc invited the representatives of the Transcaucasus for separate talks with Russia to participate in the Brest-Litovsky Conference: "The delegates of the interim states gathered in Brest-Litovsk are ready to do everything possible to recognize the independence of the Transcaucasian government, which, confident of complete success, can send its proxy delegates to Brest-Litovsk" is the content of a telegram sent to Tbilisi (Dokumenti I Materiali, 1919: 52).

Unfortunately, the Transcaucasian Commissariat, the *de facto* governing body of the South Caucasus, still obsessed with the idea of a united Russia, did not accept an invitation. The head of the government, E. Gegechkori, sent the following telegram to Brest: "Since the Caucasus is part of Russia, the issue of the armistice is up to Russia's competence" (Gotsiridze 2009: 158). In such a situation, Article IV of the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty was adopted, according to which Ardagan, Kars and Batumi districts in the Caucasus should be immediately freed of Russian troops, Russia should not interfere in the new state-legal organization of these districts and their population should be given a right to establish a new agreement with new states, especially with Turkey (Dokumenti Vneshnei, 1957: 121).

Despite protests by the Transcaucasian Commissariat against territorial losses, the Ottoman government demanded that the Transcaucasian Commissariat recognize the Brest-Litovsk Treaty and formally separate the South Caucasus from Russia, which it achieved through military and diplomatic struggle. As a result of military operations, new territories of the South Caucasus were conquered in parallel with the negotiations with the Transcaucasian delegation in Trabzon in March-April 1918. Due to the advance of the Ottoman troops in the depths of the Caucasus, the Transcaucasian Seim, composed of deputies elected to the Constituent Assembly from the Caucasus, decided on April 9 (22) 1918 to establish an independent Transcaucasian Democratic Federal Republic.

In making this decision, the perception of the situation created by the "imperialist South and the anarchist North" in the Transcaucasus was crucial for most members of the Transcaucasian Sejm (Dokumenti I Materiali, 1919: 228). N. Jordania, the leader of the Georgian Social Democrats, stated at the meeting of the Seimas: "Given that we have been abandoned, Russia, which has been protecting us here for 100 years and establishing order in one way or another, abruptly refused to go on so, thus relinquishing its own orientation, and thus instructing us to stand on our

own two feet and defend ourselves, when there is a choice – Russia or Turkey, we choose Russia, but when there is a choice – Turkey or an independent Transcaucasia, we choose an independent Transcaucasia" (Zakavkazski Seim, 1918: 20).

The Transcaucasian Federation, unfortunately, existed for a total of 33 days. Its disintegration was due to external factors that led to its creation in its time. The Ottomans were not satisfied with the Declaration of Independence of Transcaucasia, nor with the recognition of the Brest Treaty, and demanded new territories. Against the background of the aggression from the south and the new territorial conquests, it became difficult to maintain a balance between the interests of Georgians, Azerbaijanians and Armenians in the Transcaucasian Federation. There were heterogeneous, often mutually exclusive, views on the issues of war and truce among the peoples of the Caucasus. During the ongoing negotiations with the Ottomans in Trabzon and Batumi, the head of the Transcaucasian delegation and later the Chairman of the Government of the Transcaucasian Federation, Foreign Minister Akaki Chkhenkeli, wrote about this: "When one article of our demands was in favour of one nation, at the same time it abased the interests of another and it was against the interests of a third, etc." (Materiali po Istorii, 1931: 48-49). The Azerbaijanian delegates to the Seim loudly declared: "If you do not meet the demands of the Turks, war is inevitable ... Muslims will not take part in this war." (55)

In fact, the advance of the Ottoman troops into the depths of the Caucasus, their transcendental demands and claims, the Turkish orientation of Azerbaijan formed due to the created situation undermined the unity of the Transcaucasian Federation and made its disintegration inevitable in order for the nations of the Caucasus to be able to physically survive independently of each other.

On the day of the dissolution of the Transcaucasian Seim (May 26, 1918), the Democratic Republic of Georgia was proclaimed, and in the following days, the Republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan (the North Caucasus Mountain Republic had already existed since May 11). Based on the agreement signed with Germany, Georgia was declared its protectorate and ensured the protection of the borders of the Georgian state from the Ottoman invasion. Georgia and Armenia were forced to cede territories to the Ottomans in exchange for peace in the June 4, 1918 agreement. At that point, only the Azerbaijanians took advantage of the alliance with the Ottomans and began a successful struggle for the liberation of Baku, which had been occupied by the Bolsheviks.

Even at a time when, for a number of objective and subjective reasons, the issue of disintegration of the Transcaucasian Federal Democratic Republic and the establishment of independent Caucasian states in its place was on the agenda, the Georgian political elite was well aware of the importance of integrity among the peoples of the Caucasus in strengthening Georgia's state independence. At the historic meeting of the National Council on May 26, 1918, the speech of the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the National Council of Georgia, Noe Jordania, was imbued with hope and desire for the formation of the Caucasus Confederation in the future. Speaking about the representatives of national minorities living in the territory of Georgia, he hoped that

> these peoples, united under a common flag, would establish ties with the peoples living without the borders with Georgia and thus will revive the state union, which will restore the state disintegrated in their eyes. This state would be the Confederate Union of the Caucasus. The way and ideal of Georgia was directed towards making such a connection. This union would be the state organism - the union of states - which would gather the common forces around itself, would meet the external enemy and protect itself from it (Damoukidebeli Sakartvelo 1927: N17).

At the level of declarations, practically all political forces supported the idea of a united Caucasus. Even Musavat of Azerbaijan, who in 1918 "had the main responsibility for the dissolution of the Transcaucasian Federation", realized after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1919 that "the country could not cope with the stormy events alone" and that "only the united front of the peoples of the Transcaucasia could guarantee the territorial integrity of the three republics" (Kezimzade 2016: 275).

Well-known Azerbaijanian political figures, such as Ali Maardan Beg Topchibashev, Mehmet Emin Rasulzadeh and others, were very active in this case. At the second congress of the Musavat party, it was decided that Azerbaijan would address Georgia and Armenia to establish a free union of the Caucasian people. The events going on in the North Caucasus, in particular Denikin's attempt to consolidate power in the Republic of the Highlands, and the latter's address for assistance to the Georgian and Azerbaijani authorities accelerated: on the one hand, the holding of the Caucasus Conference in April-May 1919, which the delegates from Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia and the Republic of the Highlands attended, and, on the other hand, the signing of a defense military agreement between Georgia and Azerbaijan on June 16, 1919. The Armenians did not join this agreement.

Unfortunately, the ruling political elites of the South Caucasus countries were not able to overcome the difficulties faced by their states, manifested primarily in border disputes and conflicts. If the border problem between Georgia and Azerbaijan was resolved to some extent, we cannot say the same about Armenia's relations with Georgia and Azerbaijan. On October 27, 1918, the Georgian authorities invited representatives of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and the mountain republics of the North Caucasus to a conference in Tbilisi to resolve the problems existing in the very first months of the restoration of statehood and to work out a common position at the Paris Peace Conference.

Prior to the conference, Armenia requested to resolve the border issue with Georgia at the bilateral conference, which led to the postponement of the All-Caucasian Conference several times. Finally, it was held without the participation of Armenia; however, the absence of the Armenian delegation at the conference cast a shadow over the common Caucasian idea. The enemies of Transcaucasian independence, through the tense relations between the Caucasian states, captured excellent material to prove that, under the leadership of the Dashnaks, Mensheviks, and Musavats, Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan had no ability to provide peaceful life for their peoples. The wars between Armenia and Georgia and between Armenia and Azerbaijan greatly damaged the independence of the Transcaucasian republics.

Consequently, although the idea of unification as a confederation existed among the peoples of the Caucasus, it was outweighed by the animosity between them. Even the powerful Western states did not have a solid approach to the Caucasus. Initially, they linked the Caucasus problem to the resolution of the "Russian issue" and considered it an integral part of democratic Russia. After the eventual defeat of the Volunteer Army by the Bolsheviks, they even began to think of supporting the Transcaucasian republics as a barrier to Soviet Russian expansion, but it was too late. Such attitudes of the Western states towards the Caucasian region and the inability of the Caucasian states to resolve their own conflicts and cooperate against foreign aggressors made them easy prey for Soviet Russia. Some European leaders have even openly stated that peace in the Caucasus and normal relations between its nations are impossible and that this role should be assumed by some great state. Unfortunately, this role was taken over by Bolshevik Russia. The latter invaded the Mountainous Republic in March 1920, Azerbaijan – in April, Armenia – in November, and Georgia – in February-March 1921, stripping them of their right to exist independently, uniting them into the Transcaucasian Federation, and subjecting them to

Kremlin's sole dictatorship. The ruling political elite of the Caucasus, emigrated to European countries, critically understood the mistakes, and began to take practical steps to form the Caucasus Confederation.

Upon their arrival abroad, the political elite of the Caucasus states immediately saw the need to work and coordinate with each other, as well as with foreign states, political parties, public movements, and individuals. The famous Georgian politician Giorgi Gvazava wrote: "Russia conquered the Caucasus twice in a century, and this will always be the case until the nations of the Caucasus rise to the realisation that only the whole Caucasus can solve the way to Russian imperialism." (1926) The first step of the Caucasian political elite in the process of creating Caucasian unity in emigration was a meeting held on April 19, 1921 in the cabinet of Akaki Chkhenkeli with representatives of Georgia, Azerbaijan and the North Caucasus to discuss the establishment of a union between the four republics (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Mountainous Republic). Its basis should have been producing unified custom, military and foreign policy, an orientation towards itself, which precluded Russian or Ottoman domination in the Caucasus (GNA, 1831. Rev. 2, Case 280).

Even larger was the meeting of Caucasian emigrants held in Paris on May 8, 1921, in the work of which representatives of Armenia also took part. At the meeting, they outlined ways to overthrow the Bolshevik regime in the Caucasus, create a common Caucasian bloc and present the role of the Caucasus to the world community (Chumburidze 2018: 312-313).

Representatives of the Caucasus thought that their common history, kinship of habitats, ethnic mix, and the need for empowerment to protect themselves from a powerful Russian neighbor justified the organizational formulation of Caucasian unity (Coppeaux 1993: 16).

An important event on the way to the Caucasus Confederation was the 10-point Declaration on Political, Military and Economic Union of Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and the North Caucasus Mountains, issued in Paris on June 10, 1921. The Declaration expressed the desire of the signatories to work together to achieve the independence, democratic governance and economic prosperity of the peoples of the Caucasus. This also included disputes among them, especially because of border arbitration intended to establish the unity and consensus of the Caucasian states in the field of foreign policy or to enforce a unified military-defense, customs and transit system, envisioned to strengthen trade and industrial ties with foreign states and foreign capitals for the exploitation of the natural resources of the Caucasus. Their foreign policy priority was to establish friendly and good-neighborly relations with Russia, Turkey and Iran based

on the recognition of their territorial integrity and full independence by other states. The Declaration critically assessed the occupation of the Caucasus by the Russian and Turkish armed forces in 1919-1921 and called for the withdrawal of these forces from the country. At the same time, the Declaration considered illegal all agreements that were not based on the freely expressed will of the peoples of the Caucasus republics (Declaration 1921: N2).

They even more resolutely recognized the economic and political integrity of the Caucasus in the Second Declaration, adopted in September 1924. In November, a decision was made to give the Union of Caucasian Nations the legal form of a confederation in the future. They also undertook to draft the Constitution of the Confederation or its main provisions. At that stage, the Armenian representatives did not join this decision.

This way, the structure gradually increased. The Central Body of the Union of the Caucasus Republics, the Council of the Union and the Unified Information Bureau were established. The first included the heads of the delegations of the Caucasus countries, and the second, by the decision of the Council of Representatives of the Caucasus Republics of July 20, 1921, was composed of one representative from each of the republics and missions (Protokol Sobrania, 1921).

Representatives of the political elite of the Caucasus paid great attention to the issues of relations with foreigners, met with the heads of government of European countries, ministers, leaders of various political parties, individually and collectively propagandized in favor of the Union of the Caucasian Republics in the political, parliamentary and commercial circles of European countries. Powerful world powers viewed the Caucasus as a whole and pushed Caucasian leaders here (Protokol Sobrania, 1921).

The Prometheus chained to the Caucasus Mountains became the symbol of the "Promethean Movement" introduced by Parisian political immigrants in Paris in the mid-1920s. In 1926, it received the name of the Prometheus League of Peoples Oppressed by Russia, in which, in addition to the representatives of the Caucasus, the representatives of Cossacks of Dnipropetrovsk Ukraine, Don and Kuban Cossacks, Crimean and Volga Tatars, Turkestan of three small nations of Ugric-Finnish origin of Northern Russia entered.

The activation of the Promethean movement is connected with the name of the famous Polish political figure, Marshal Jozef Pilsudski. He was well aware of the need to consolidate the struggle of non-Russian peoples in order to create independent states and then save them. That is why, both in the Prometheus movement in general and in the unification of Caucasian

emigrants in particular, and in the establishment of a harmonious relationship between them, the Polish government invested great resources, which greatly influenced this movement.

Prometheus political movement began to form organizational structures in 1926 with the Independent Caucasus Committee and issued its own magazine, *Prometheus*, and two years later, the political club of the same name. In 1930, the Prometheus Movement Headquarters were established in Warsaw with branches in France, Turkey, Finland and China.

The highest achievement of the Promethean League was the finalization of the events leading up to the formation of the Confederation of Caucasian Nations, which was facilitated by the great discontent of the population in the Soviet Caucasus, conditioned by rural collectivization, total industrialization, oppression of intellectuals, the complete lack of free speech and democracy.

In July 1934, a conference of Caucasian emigrants was held in Warsaw, where the Pact of the Caucasus Confederation was signed. Here is one noteworthy fact to consider. Because of the non-aggression pact between the Soviet Union and Poland in 1932, which did not allow hostile forces to operate on their territories, Brussels was indicated as a place of the Caucasus Confederation Act (*Dvijenie Prometei*). This conference was also notable for the decision to form a government in exile in the Caucasus, which was practically fulfilled in Paris a little later, in January 1935, as the Council of the Confederation of the Caucasus (*Dvijenie Prometei*).

The draft consisted of 17 articles. It represented the Caucasus in its entirety: Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, the state of the mountains. On July 14, 1934, the already reduced 6-article Caucasus Confederation Pact was signed by the National Centers of Georgia, Azerbaijan and the North Caucasus. The Armenians did not sign the document, but a place was left for them. The basis of the Caucasus Confederation was the implementation of a common foreign policy course on condition of the protection of the sovereignty of each of its republics, provided by specially created "appropriate bodies" of the confederation. The borders of the Confederation would be guarded by an army of military units of the Confederate member states under a single command that would be directly subordinate to the governing bodies of the Confederation. Disputes between the Confederate States would be settled through direct negotiations, and if not possible, by compulsory arbitration, or by the Supreme Court of the Confederation, whose decisions would be binding on all subjects of the Confederation. (Journal "*Samshoblo*" 1934: N16). In addition to the magazine *Prometheus*, the unity of the Caucasus was preached by the magazines *Caucasus*, *Gorgy Caucasus*, *Independent Caucasus*, *North Caucasus*, a simultaneous collection

Caucasus published first in 1934 in Paris in Russian language and then in European languages (Sharadze 2005: v.VII: 408).

Many well-known representatives of the Caucasus political elite worked hard to unite the Caucasian nations and create a united confederate state, but the merits of Akaki Chkhenkeli, Ali Mardan Bek Topchibashev and Heydar Bamatov should be specially mentioned. In addition to discussing theoretical issues and publishing significant articles in periodicals, they also engaged in practical work to form a confederation. There was some disagreement between them in the process of working, but all of them were ardent supporters of the Caucasus Confederation. In a letter dated 1931, Akaki Chkhenkeli wrote: "The Caucasus and its four main nations belong to each other, their disconnection is unnatural and can not be justified in any way [...] The Caucasus is committed to playing a very honourable role in the international arena... on one condition: if his leaders are able to maintain the high standard" (GNA 1831: case 229).

Unfortunately, the Caucasus political elite gradually lost the levers of influence over the events. If in the early 1920s, the governments of European countries paid more attention to the Caucasus and, consequently, to the members of the Caucasus political emigration, their attitudes gradually changed from the early 1930s in parallel with the increasing role of the Soviet Union in the international arena, which was revealed by the treaties signed by a number of European countries with the Soviet Union and the admission of the latter to the League of Nations. From now on, no member of the League of Nations would be able to support those who were already considered separatists. The Confederacy became just an informal assembly of individual dreamers, defeated warriors.

A great friend of Georgians, Jean Martin, editor of the *Geneva magazine*, published an article entitled "Caucasus" in the journal *La Revue de Prometheus* in 1934, in which he expressed his sorrow over the forgetfulness of the problems of the Caucasian nations by Europeans (Martin 1939: 6-8). The Western nations ignored the violent annexations of the *de jure*-recognized republics by Moscow and themselves, and also the repressions and atrocities planned and carried out by the Kremlin.

The Caucasus political elite in exile, dreaming of the Caucasus confederation, believed in the principles of Western governments and Woodrow Wilson. Unfortunately, as the French scholar, Etienne Copo wrote: "Exiled governments had no experience of the cynicism of European political and diplomatic methods", and the expected result was also achieved: in the 1920-30s, "this movement was crushed by the cynicism and selfishness of the democracies of that time and the Bolshevik beast" (Copo 1993: N16).

Conclusion

Created by individual representatives of the emigrating Caucasian political elite, the Caucasus Confederation only existed on paper for a while, but the greatest result of their work was to acknowledge the need for close ties between the Caucasian nations, reassessing their common mistakes as well as the necessity to comprehend that the absence of a common struggle made it easier for Bolshevik Russia to achieve its goal and to fulfill the occupation-annexation of their countries.

The reality created today opens a window of opportunity in favour of the idea of creating a Caucasus confederation. Let us hope that the pro-confederal impulses of the past in the twenty-first century will give a stimulus first to the cultural and economic solidarity of Caucasians and then to the possibility of establishing new alliances aimed at establishing a full-fledged confederation of the Caucasus. The events occurring 100 years ago should serve as a history lesson and show the peoples of the Caucasus the right course of action to maintain state independence, while the leaders of modern powerful states should understand the guidelines for resolving the "Russian issue."

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"And they all lived happily ever after": The Failure of a Happy Ending in *The Piano* (1993) and *Barbe Bleue* (2009)

Yidan HU*

Abstract

Jane Campion's The Piano *(1993) and Catherine Breillat's* Barbe Bleue *(2009) are film adaptations of the tale* Bluebeard*, both of which have a seemingly bright closure – "and they all lived happily ever after". "They", as the female, are in the becoming process since "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (de Beauvoir 1956: 273), which changes the nature of the film denouement. By looking at the female protagonists Ada McGrath in* The Piano *and Marie-Catherine in* Barbe Bleue*, this research aims to deal with how female "decisions" in attempting to accomplish themselves in the face of a crisis affect the understanding of the film's ending. First, female characterisation and plot development are investigated with the construction of women's feelings and perceptions at a given moment, influencing the subsequent outcomes. Second, the significance of narrative techniques is expounded with audience's affective interaction with characters. The conclusion reached is that in both films, repressed female temperament allows women to make judgements and choices that predetermine the tragic core of the happy ending. The significance of this study is to draw attention to the plight of women in the undercurrent, to make it possible for the silent cries behind the beautiful fantasies to be heard.*

Keywords: *happy ending, feminism, folk tale, film adaptation, Bluebeard*

Introduction

The ending of a story lies at the heart of understanding a literary theme, just as in a typical fairy tale where the prince and the princess live happily ever after, which is the classic paradigm. Nevertheless, the question of whether a perfect ending to a story means the end of all conflicts is left to scholars. The French folk tale *Bluebeard ("Barbe Bleue")* tells the story of a young lady who, with the help of her siblings, fights her murderous husband and lives happily ever after. On the surface, the two films, *Barbe Bleue* (Breillat 2009) and *The Piano* (Campion 1993), follow the paradigm of the original tale of "and they all lived happily ever after" when Marie-Catherine and Ada McGrath, as figures of the oppressed, escape Bluebeard and Alisdair Stewart, both of whom stand for the oppressor. However, the research needs to explore whether such a cheerful outer core of both films is doomed to be

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drawn to a tragic core. In other words, researchers should be alert to the narrative traps and consider whether this apparently happy finale is a blessing or a curse for the fulfilment of female self-worth, as a form of the complex feminine consciousness is involved in the disturbing situations of the films' endings. According to the argument in *The Second Sex* (de Beauvoir 1956: 27), the drama of female resides in the conflict between the longing for the subject as ego and the compulsory situation of making herself secondary, rendering the self-realisation in the female situation worthy of attention. In *Barbe Bleue* and *The Piano*, the "decisions" as choice and judgement made by the female protagonists in the face of conflicting character relationships, whether active or passive, are attempts to gain access to the self as essential.

The aim of the essay, therefore, is to compare the different ways in which the female protagonists' "decisions" on complex situations influence the direction of the endings and their significance. This study is divided into two parts: focusing on the story content of the two denouements, the first part will compare the similarities and the differences in characterisation and development, as well as their text meanings; emphasising the closural means, the second part will compare how the "decisions" of the female characters are represented by narrative techniques and how audience significance is generated. The essay will conclude that the ritualisation of closure in the female protagonists' "decisions" in *Barbe Bleue* and *The Piano* is inevitably tragic, manifesting the internal and external contradictions of female consciousness.

Characterisation and development

As the story is a continuum of events and functions like a complete organism, the construction of female characters in the plot development is intertwined with the nature of the ending. First, there is no doubt that the most significant commonality between the two endings lies in their unhappy dimension, even if all the apparent contradictions of the characters' relationships are resolved. A happy ending equates to a ritual of closure for the protagonists, with the "final couples" giving the "promises of continuation" (Macdowell 2013: 57, 77). In Breillat's *Barbe Bleue*, the ending stops at the image of Marie-Catherine touching Bluebeard's head and does not follow the original fairy tale ending in which the female protagonist is married to another man with a bright future, making it possible to conclude that the ending without "final couples" does not belong to the "happy ending" category. In the case of Campion's *The Piano*, although Ada and Baines end up living together, the new marriage has no subjectivity for the woman (Gillet 1995: 281) and is therefore not considered to be a happy

ending. After the exclusion of happy endings, the demises of Bluebeard and Catherine's sister, Ada's broken finger, and her imagery of suicide are representations of death that overshadow both films with tragedy.

As for *Barbe Bleue*, Breillat's horrifying style as a director lies in the consistent presentation of death and sex together, which always makes for a kind of affective violence (Brinkema 2006: 161). In sexual relationships, it can be argued that the woman is often passive and objectified and that the choices and judgements she makes help her to achieve the self. When the woman is considered "in view of her frustration in transcendence [of the male]", she defends 'intimate' things around her, such as the 'room' (de Beauvoir 1956: 337-378). After marrying Bluebeard, Marie-Catherine demands a room of her own in the castle and keeps picking it out in the corridors. This choice maps out a way of self-realisation through occupation. Similarly, the subsequent decision of using a key to open a forbidden room is attributed to Marie-Catherine's desire for self, which causes a dreadful ending as it clashes with Bluebeard's patriarchal repression.

Unlike *Barbe Bleue*, in *The Piano*, Ada's choice to have a special thing around her as a representation of her ego is more pronounced. According to de Beauvoir (592), a kind of "feminine sensibility" resides in the fetish for beautiful items, such as Ada's piano, where she creates her own world. The piano, as Ada's only means of self-expression, is attacked in three rounds. The first time is when the piano is thrown away with scorn by Stewart, and the second one is when Baines takes the piano as a bargaining chip for sexual favours. The first two attacks lead to Ada's decision to throw the piano into the sea to end the pre-existing world. Unlike the first two, which are reactive, the "decision" to make a devastating attack on the piano is proactive. It is Ada's desire for freedom and self rather than submissiveness to men that spurs her choice (Gillett 1995: 282). Nevertheless, the initiative of this "decision" comes at the cost of the death of the spiritual world. When a piano key and a finger are absent, Ada completely loses her voice in both the spiritual and physical worlds, and thus develops a suicidal tendency, which points to two layers. The first layer is that of Ada being pulled into the sea by sticking her foot into the rope on the boat. Scholars such as Dyson (1995: 268) consider Ada's life with Baines after being rescued from the sea in the ending as a 'new-born' New Zealander farewell to the European bourgeois culture represented by the piano, which casts a positive dimension on the ending. This argument, however, to some extent overlooks the essential contradiction between Ada and Baines. For women, the meanings in the male world are unclear, as men often invite women to violate the norms preached by their like (de Beauvoir 1956: 581). Baines' earlier seduction of

Ada is a violation of public order, but Ada is punished by her husband when she gives the key to Baines. This interaction suggests that in a patriarchal society, men are always given tolerance, while women are always strictly disciplined. As an object, Ada is not genuinely pleased in the ending. Consequently, there is a second indication of Ada's suicidal tendency, namely imagining herself floating at night with a piano that has sunk to the bottom of the sea.

Both Marie-Catherine's and Ada's misfortune endings stem from a marriage of a quid pro quo nature. The combined conclusions of San Juan (1998: 126–128) and Gillet (1995: 283) indicate that women have an exchange value transforming the social relationship between people into a relationship between people and property, and thus women are inevitably objectified. Firstly, when women become the property of their husbands, they are required to be faithful or face punishment (de Beauvoir 1956: 107). For Marie-Catherine, the death of her father forces the sisters to leave the convent and live in poverty with their mother, and she chooses to marry Bluebeard in exchange for the satisfaction of her material needs. Ada undergoes two affective relationships in exchange. The first is sold to Stewart by her father; the second is at the end, when Stewart declares that Ada wants Baines to take her away. This choice is not necessarily Ada's "decision", but that of Stewart and Baines in a transaction between men. Secondly, in a patriarchal society, marriage transfers women from the father-centred family of origin to the husband-centred marital family. Thus, unable to support themselves and without external assistance, women keep marriage as a fate given by social tradition (417). In Ada's time, only married women are respected as mothers, so she makes the "decision" to stay with Baines in the end. In Marie-Catherine's time in ancient France, a married woman is an adult ward, while a widow can enjoy all the wealth of a man (112). As a result, the "decisions" to end the relationships with male protagonists are absent in the denouement, suppressing females' self-awareness.

Nonetheless, one of central ideas shared by *Barbe Bleue* and *The Piano* is that, even though female self-realisation is silenced by the form of marriage, the female protagonists' "decisions" on their gender identities have a fluid external relationship: to occupy an active position by passive means. In *The Piano*, Baines is naked in front of Ada, and Stewart is the object of Ada's touch at first. In *Barbe Bleue*, only Bluebeard is shown naked. These reversals of the classic heterosexual dynamic are mediated by the female gaze (Bruzzi 1995: 261) and subvert the binary relationship between the male as a subject and the female as an object in the sexual partnership of touch (de

Beauvoir 1956: 399). However, in the face of these reversals of sexual discourse, both Ada and Marie-Catherine make the conservative "decisions" to adopt a passive stance, thus ensuring survival in the end. This idea is supported by de Beauvoir's theory that men are so keen on conquest that women make themselves prey (649). Similarly, it is also in line with Breillat's thoughts that Bluebeard is Eve and gives Marie-Catherine the opportunity to commit the original sin (Wheatley 2010: 42). In the denouements, Bluebeard and Stewart believe that they are on the side of justice, that their wives are the ones to be judged and that they can hunt them down for their dishonesty. Nevertheless, in both cases, of Bluebeard and Mare-Catherine, and of Stewart and Ada respectively, the marriages are sexless, the masculinity of the two husbands is invisible, and they are the actual prey to be castrated in a formal marriage. Moreover, in the ending of Ada's story, keeping herself in a low profile also allows Baines the pleasure of being the rescuer. This satisfaction is in fact controlled by Ada, compensating for the deficit of being the Other in the relationship. In short, since "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (de Beauvoir 1956: 273), the complexity of the environment creates a fluidity of position for the woman, enabling her to make dynamic "decisions" that allow her to survive crisis and repression, and to always persevere in her counterattack, which brings positive significance to tragic endings.

Narrative technique and audience significance

According to Chatman (1975: 302), the story itself is a virtual rather than a real object, and the aesthetic object of the narrative is the story as expressed by the discourse, composed in the language of the medium and the canvas, so the aesthetic apprehension of two endings requires the narrative devices of cinema to be studied. First, as the narrative implies communicative acts where there is a sender and receiver (304), the narrative persona is of importance as a link between the audience and the narrator. It can be argued that Catherine in *Barbe Bleue* and Ada in *The Piano* are both "dramatized narrators" who act as story characters (19) and "implied authors" who are responsible for the narrative worldview (Herman and Vervaeck 2015: 17). For Barbe Bleue, the adoption of the third-person narrative allows the plot of the story to be driven through Catherine's reading. In his book *Ways of Seeing* (2008), Berger asserts that, in the world of the screen, it is the audience that is at the centre of the picture and the film image is the result of the audience's presence. Therefore, Catherine is not only reading the fairy tale to her sister, but also narrating to the audience, giving them a dual identity. On the one hand, the audience, like Catherine, is a spectator, a naratee of the

seventeenth-century story, in which case the audience can be divorced from the Marie-Catherine tragedy for the time being. On the other hand, the audience coexists with Catherine in the modern world, as her audience, and is on an equal footing with Marie-Anne. Thus, Catherine's "decision" to continue to tell her story while ignoring her sister's fears intertwines the audience with the tragedy of the characters. At the same time, cinematography aids this intertwining (Figure 1). In contrast to the passive participation of the audience in the narrative in *Barbe Bleue*, *The Piano*, borrowing the role of Ada, adopts a first-person narrative that allows Ada to be silent in front of other characters but gives voice to herself and the audience synchronously. Accordingly, the audience becomes one with Ada and supports any "decisions" made by the character.

Figure 1. The audience looks up at Catherine and shares a passive identity with Marie-Catherine (Breillat 2009, 01:14:53–01:15:20)

Furthermore, Ada, as the narrator, also steers the audience into the cross-media narrative. In the end, Ada still imagines herself at night in a silent scene with the piano sinking to the bottom of the sea, regarding this silence as a strange kind of lullaby (Figure 2). In this film clip, the "sound" of the lullaby is provided by the seabed images, and the visual medium (of the image) replaces the auditory medium (of the sound) as a representation of Ada's most authentic self in her "decision". Similarly, the ritualised ending of *Barbe Bleue*, with a still image of Marie-Catherine placing Bluebeard's head on a dinner plate to demonstrate her vengeful "decision", is also a cross-media narrative. It could be considered that the still image is intertextualized with the painting *The Last Supper* and the emotions such as panic, anger, and

guilt flow through this forbidden image. Assuming that Marie-Catherine's position overlaps that of Jesus, the possibility that the audience viewing the painting is questioned as Judas adds to the drama of the ending. However, since the "real-life familiarity of finality" is always employed as the rhetoric of an ending (Macdowell 2013: 66), the lullaby, as a daily ritual of farewell closure before going to sleep, provokes a more tactile sense of the story ending rather than the painting.

Figure 2. "[T]here is a silence where no sound may be"—the piano and the body fade away, leaving the audience with the imagery of a "lullaby" in which Ada's original self is forever silenced and thus rendered void of sound (Campion 1993: 1:55:06–1:55:11)

It is worth noting that *Barbe Bleue* and *The Piano* storylines end with more than just underwater or painting shots. The multiplication of the narrative lines seems to generate a stronger sense of finality in the audience, while the double ending of the narrative discourse plays a crucial role in the presentation of the complex feature of the female characters. Firstly, the two embedded storylines of *Barbe Bleue* run through and intersect with each other, answering questions previously reserved for the audience in the finale as a "narrative closure" (71). For example, in the opening scenes, Maire-Catherine, feeling betrayed by the abbess as a sister in a religious sense, curses: "I will strangle her, hang her by her hair, watch her die" (Breillat 2009: 00:09:45–00:09:58), which is an image that coincides with the scene at the end, where Catherine replaces Marie-Catherine into the forbidden room. Thus, Catherine is given the power to make a "decision" on murder and terrorise her old sister to fall to her death. When Marie-Catherine and Catherine feel their subjects of self are violated in their love-hate relationship, their "decisions" made in the opening and ending stifle the

possibility of realising the sisterly alliance and challenge "the sisterhood" (Losser 1994: 46). Secondly, unlike *Barbe Bleue*'s narrative framework of "a story inside a story", *The Piano*'s different ending takes the form of "a new story starting at the end" when Ada tells the audience about her new life with Baines. While it suggests "what happens next", the "next" is missing, leading to an "unchanging monolithic state" (Macdowell 2013: 63). Ada's "new" self after making her life's "decision" is static and her memory shared with the audience is thin. Accordingly, when the film ends with a shot of the ocean floor, the narrative ritual is completed successfully by re-establishing the common memory belonging to the traumatised Ada and the audience. In sum, *The Piano* takes the viewer to a narrative ending at the bottom of the sea, that might be a reference to death as *Barbe Bleue*'s, which is the cost of the self-fulfilling "decision". The difference is that the former sacrifices the original being, but the latter slays the contradictory object.

Conclusion

Neither *Barbe Bleue* nor *The Piano* can avoid a tragic ending. Both protagonists suffer from the inequality of gender relations in patriarchal marriages, and *Barbe Bleue* also involves the internal heterogeneity of sisterhood. Judging by their surroundings, the choices and actions of the female protagonists are "decisions" that seek to realise their subjectivity. Although the female protagonists succeed in defending themselves in dangerous situations, the results of their self-actualisation are blank. At the same time, the narrative devices of both films allow the characters to invite the audience to build a community joining in the destruction to complete the ritual of tragedy, going beyond the meaning of the text. I believe that it is the male characters, such as the musketeers in *Barbe Bleue* and Baines in *The Piano*, who lead to female protagonists' physical deliverance, a case of Deus ex machina at the end of both films. Therefore, it could be considered that the lack of female initiative for self-redemption, a limitation of both films, is able to render more possibilities for the creation of narrative closure.

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Between Two Worlds: Shakespeare the Ordinary Man and Artist

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Abstract

Jude Morgan's novel, The Secret Life of William Shakespeare*, is a work of biofiction that deals with the playwright's life from shortly before he met Anne Hathaway up to the year 1603, highlighting private aspects such as the relationships with his family and friends – and even his rivals. At the same time, the novel offers an insight into the Elizabethan world in which William Shakespeare lived and rose to fame, actually a pretext to bring to the foreground timeless issues which characterise today's world as well. The portrayal offered by Morgan is, therefore, one that aims to reconcile the two personas of the Bard – the family man and the poet and playwright. The present paper aims to analyse how those aspects are put forward by the novel, relying on features of postmodernism and the biographical novel, as the author attempts to fill in the gaps in Shakespeare's life narrative. What is more, emphasis is laid on the relative concept of 'truth' and how it is deconstructed in the shaping of this particular version of Shakespeare's story.*

Keywords: *biography, biofiction, Shakespeare, truth, life narrative*

A postmodernist biographical novel

In order to discuss some of the features of Jude Morgan's *The Secret Life of William Shakespeare,* it seems necessary to briefly take into account the characteristics of postmodernism, which may be traced in this novel.

Postmodernism is mainly defined as a reaction against modernism, bringing to the forefront concepts of "fracturing, fragmentation, indeterminacy and plurality" (Malpas 2005: 5), but it is more than that, as it presupposes "multifarious aspects" (Praisler 2005: 59), as well as an "erosion of the older distinction between high culture and so-called mass or popular culture" (Jameson 1983: 112). For instance, postmodernism favours "the return to history" and to narrative. It also "blurs" the boundary between history and fiction, emphasising that history is not to be taken as fact, as it only represents "another version of his-story"; at the same time, postmodernism plays on the "fiction/fact paradox" which allows the "'consumer' to understand that the only reality it observes is that of the very textuality of the text, of the materiality of the pages." What is more, postmodernism is "governed by intertextuality" as the writer is aware that

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little has been left "unsaid" or "unwritten," therefore he or she turns to texts that precede him/her (Praisler 2005: 60-61).

According to John Hawkes, "the true enemies of the novel were plot, character, setting and theme" (qtd. in Lewis 2001: 126), which many authors have tried to shatter and change. Postmodernist writers prefer to structure narratives in more original and personal ways. Reference should be made in this respect to the use of multiple endings, going against closure by offering the reader a multitude of outcomes for the plot. Openness and ambiguity can also be achieved "by breaking up the text into short fragments or sections, separated by space, titles, numbers or symbols" (Lewis 2001: 127).

The concept of "truth" is questionable in the case of biography, especially in biographical novels, in which fact and fiction are interwoven. As Malpas suggests, truth is "based on conventions and beliefs rather than absolute principles" (2005: 135). The notions of "truth" and "reality" are continually challenged and deconstructed in Jude Morgan's novel; therefore, in order to examine how this deconstruction works in *The Secret Life of William Shakespeare*, one should first and foremost highlight the importance of the paratext which accompanies it. For instance, the front cover of the novel announces its subject, as the first thing that draws the attention of the reader is the title, written in a large cursive font that is perhaps reminiscent of Shakespeare's own times, thus lending a sense of "authenticity" to the story. The use of the word "secret" might suggest that the novel offers a hidden story of Shakespeare's life, one that has never been heard of or written about before, and that only the writer is privy to.

Perhaps the most revealing piece of paratext, however, is Jude Morgan's own commentary at the end of the novel, in which he offers an explanation for his choice of biographical subject, declaring that he "wanted above all to reinstate Shakespeare as a real person" (2012: 441) and write a novel "about a human being of flesh and blood" (443), given that people nowadays have a rather equivocal attitude towards the playwright: the larger public perceives him as a distant god-like figure, his works being more often than not dismissed or considered too difficult to understand and digest. On the other hand, the elite put him up on a pedestal, while "silly names" are attributed to him, such as the Bard or the Swan of Avon, which only turns him into a product, all "resemblance to a human being" stripped from his persona (441).

Therefore, Jude Morgan decided to offer his readers a different perspective on Shakespeare, in an attempt to change his reception and to bring him closer to the mass audiences. In his endeavour, he was helped by the fact that there is little biographical data on the playwright which,

according to him, poses a great, exciting challenge to novelists like himself (441). However, Morgan does not claim to offer a definitive version of Shakespeare's life, as such a thing would be impossible: there will always be another novelist who will take up the task of writing a novel on Shakespeare, offering yet another interpretation of the little information that survived (442).

Through the issues that Morgan approaches in constructing Shakespeare's life, the literary figure becomes a universal cultural icon, any reader being able to associate the struggles and the pleasures that Shakespeare's character is experiencing on page with events of their own lives and times. Thus, Jude Morgan weaves fact into fiction in order to construct what seems to be a "genuine" version of William Shakespeare, in such a manner that one might forget that one is reading a *version* of the life of a literary figure, an (inter)national cultural icon whose name alone evokes quality and sophistication to, perhaps, anyone's mind. The reader of the novel can sympathise with him and, at the same time, he or she is enabled to reflect on – and better understand – their own life.

As a postmodernist biographical novel, it can be said that *The Secret Life of William Shakespeare* has a disrupted structure: despite its chronological linearity, which is made obvious by the years marked in the title of each chapter, significant episodes from Shakespeare's life are interspersed with episodes from other characters' lives, such as Anne Shakespeare, or Ben Jonson – Shakespeare's contemporary and aspiring scholar, in what Julia Novak called the "portmanteau narrative" (2017: 16). At a first glance, there does not seem to be a connection between all these episodes; however, they do help construct the character of Will Shakespeare and his life, since they provide insight into his relations with the people around him and draw parallels between similar events in different characters' lives. Furthermore, part of the novel is actually written from Ben Jonson's perspective, Morgan explaining that he did so in order to

> make it clear that Shakespeare was not a solitary genius, single-handedly inventing Elizabethan drama. He was one of many: perhaps the most consistently successful, but still working in a crowded marketplace. (Morgan 2012: 444)

Intertextuality also plays a major role in the construction of Shakespeare's life story. For instance, there are mentions in the text of other highly popular and successful plays, such as Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* or Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, *Doctor Faustus* or *The Jew of Malta*. Moreover, the titles of the fourteen chapters that make up the novel are, in

fact, the names of plays written by Shakespeare's fellow Renaissance playwrights. Therefore, by subtly incorporating references to other Renaissance playwrights, both in the titles of the chapters and in the story itself, Jude Morgan's aim does not seem to be that of contesting Shakespeare's genius – which he puts in opposition to Ben Jonson's "scholarly and painstaking" (Morgan 2012: 444) writing – but to raise awareness of the other notable dramatists that helped shape, together with him, the Elizabethan drama and then the Jacobean and Caroline stage, which tend to be forgotten as the already-formed image of Shakespeare puts him forward as the sole great playwright of the Renaissance. Morgan's decision might also work as an oblique criticism of the scholars and academics who are inclined to dismiss the importance of other writings in favour of Shakespeare's. The only exception in the list of plays selected by Jude Morgan is *A Larum to London*, which Maltby comments upon in his *The Black Legend in England*, saying that it "should serve to remind us that not all Elizabethan playwrights were touched with genius" (1971: 52). Thus, this might assert Shakespeare's position as a playwright, albeit brilliant, among other (more or less) successful playwrights.

"Oh, he was real enough, (…) but certainly elusive."

Unlike other texts dealing with Shakespeare's biography, in Jude Morgan's version, Will's career is closely linked to the relationship with his family, the latter playing an important role in shaping his progress towards fame. However, although he eventually becomes quite a popular man, Will has always been a complete mystery.

Morgan depicts him as always waiting eagerly for the players to arrive in Stratford, so he can watch their performances and talk to them. For instance, to young Will, whose passion for the theatre seems to surpass everything else in his life, summer is associated with the coming of the players and, in turn, with the renewal of life itself:

> Now summer, and the players would soon be here. Mud from the storm splashed up to his calves but the sky was all high blue contrition, temper-fit gone; the meadows brimmed with light and the trees were heavy, nodding drunken with leaf, and everything he saw and smelt said the players, time for the players to rattle their tinker's cart of seduction over Stratford Bridge. Time to wake. (Morgan 2012: 14)

However, his father's disapproval makes things difficult for him. In this way, a recurrent issue that is tackled in Jude Morgan's novel is that of family and parenthood.

Right from the beginning of the first chapter, it is clear that Will has a tumultuous relationship with his father, who does not seem to approve of his son's inclinations towards the theatre. Instead, John Shakespeare would like his son to follow in his footsteps and become a famous glove maker. Will is constantly chastised for sneaking off to see the players, in spite of his father's requests, who claims that:

> [p]layers are well in their way. But still theirs is a loose, low, scrambling sort of life, even with some great noble's name clapped to them. And they sow idleness and fruitless dreaming. Now consider, is that fitting for John Shakespeare's son? (2012: 2)

This might be an oblique comment on a recurrent belief that is even nowadays attached to the job of an artist: its "fruitless" nature, as the general opinion is often that it only leads to "dreaming" and "idleness" on the part of both the creator and the consumer, given that the product is not one that can be used to directly improve the quality of life. Joan, Will's sister, remarks on the subject of play-going that it is "[a] pity the play brings out the low sort, for it's a pleasant, pretty diversion after all" (2012: 49). Therefore, the idea that plays, and implicitly Shakespeare's own works, were addressed to the masses is reinforced in the novel, challenging today's notion of their status as high-culture, intended for the elite.

What is more, it can be said that the reaction against the players that John Shakespeare displays is a rather hypocritical one:

> Oh, it's wrong to be a player, they declare. But what do they do when they wake up in the morning? Straight be themselves? No: they remind themselves who they are. […] They have to because otherwise they're walking on ice and it's cracking. (2012: 39-40)

Jack Towne cleverly explains that everyone is a "player" of some sort, as every person has to play a given role in society; at the same time, he claims that a player's business is lying (2012: 41), hence sending across the idea that everybody alters the truth. Anne herself fears that Will might lose himself altogether (2012: 63) when he plunges into the world of acting, as assuming too many different identities might eventually lead to forgetting which the "real" one is. Therefore, the notion of "reality" is questioned once again in Morgan's novel: which of the many facets of a person is actually the real one,

given that everyone plays various roles throughout their life, depending on the situation at hand?

John Shakespeare's remark "is that fitting for John Shakespeare's son?" may also be a thinly veiled critique on another issue of our times, that of parents expecting – even persuading – their children to take their example career-wise or, at least, to work in a domain that can bring them high material satisfaction. Shame is also something that perhaps drives John Shakespeare in his attempts at coaxing Will into stopping seeing the players. Jude Morgan may draw on the unfortunate events of John's life as the motivation behind his wishes and desires regarding Will's path in life: financial struggles and falling "on hard times" which made John stop attending council meetings and lay low (Schoenbaum 1991: 9), perhaps even troubles of the illegal sort, such as wool dealing, according to Rowe (qtd. in 1991: 67). For instance, Anne's brother Bartholomew comments on John's situation:

> No, they say he's [John Shakespeare] a queer, awkward fellow to deal with nowadays. There was all that ticklish matter of him trading in wool, and going before the court for it. And now I hear he never stirs abroad. Half mad, or popish. (Morgan 2012: 10)

Consequently, it is no surprise that Morgan's version of John Shakespeare is keen on leading his son to the "right" path, that of becoming a respectable glover, like himself, instead of dealing with obscure matters, such as acting. As a result, Will is constantly forced to choose between his duty and his calling, but, although he is quite good at his trade, "the handiwork of stitching his two selves together was getting beyond his dexterity. He could feel tugging and tearing" (14).

After marriage, Will assumes – among others, on his journey towards fame – the new roles of husband and father "[a]nd he seems to belong to each of them, like a portrait that suits any frame" (95). It is clear that Will's inclination towards playing and drama writing also affects his private life, as he is putting on different "masks" in different circumstances, so good at playing roles that he might have everyone around him fooled, himself included. The boundary between Will the man, the father and husband, and Will the actor is so thin that, at times, the latter seems to completely take over the former, leaving no room for distinction. This can be seen especially in the relationship between Will and his children: he is a stranger to them, more like an uncle who occasionally comes bearing gifts (232). What is more, Hamnet seems to be the most affected by Will's being away from home as

he often has unpleasant reactions upon seeing him: "Hamnet burst into tears, ran away, crying, 'Who's that man, I don't know that man…'" (232). Similarly, when Will puts on his actor mask and performs in front of his family, in an attempt at entertaining them, things quickly go wrong:

> And the laughter disguises it at first, until it will not be hid: the thin hard cry of Hamnet. He doesn't like it. It's not real. It's stupid. Father's pretending. It's frightening. Looking stricken, Will throws off the actor, bends and stretches arms to his son. Yet still perhaps there is something in his gesture that is a little stylised, that shows he is accustomed to assuming a feeling: even perhaps real ones have to be tried on first. (236)

Hamnet turns to his grandfather – with whom he seems to have a better relationship than with his own father – for comfort, his accusatory looks directed at everyone for "indulging the lie" (236).

Despite the bad feelings between the two of them, Will travels to Stratford to be by his father's side as he lies on his deathbed. In a dramatic scene, John makes it clear that he never really knew Will, his son: "'I don't know you.' Very softly. 'Why don't you let people know you? Why?'" (345). John Shakespeare's words to his son might be an oblique comment reflecting on the elusive nature of William Shakespeare's life, which makes it difficult for biographers to offer a clear perspective and distinguish fact from fiction.

Will does eventually succeed in his career, spending more and more time with the players until he starts writing his own plays and sonnets. Consequently, it is only natural that speculations on Shakespeare's life start to circulate following his gradual rise to fame, given that even Ben Jonson finds it difficult to learn more about "Master Shakespeare": some thought he was a butcher's son, others that he was a lawyer's clerk; the most striking theory is that of a drunkard that Ben came across, claiming that Shakespeare "was not really a play-maker at all, and the plays he put his name to were brought to the theatre by night in a silk-tied bundle, with a peer's coronet on the seal," before passing out (193). Therefore, Jude Morgan challenges the theories of identity and authorship that surround William Shakespeare, trying to perhaps dispel the rumours and provide a semblance of truth about him.

Nevertheless, how can one understand Shakespeare when he did not know himself? Always reluctant to expose details about his life or the innermost workings of his brilliant mind, he ponders – via a passage employing the free-indirect discourse – the idea that "in himself he had dusky vacancies and gaps on which he wanted no searching light to fall" (327).

"You made Will Shakespeare, Anne."

In her book, *Shakespeare's Wife*, Germaine Greer comments on how the wives of almost all great writers are completely obliterated from history (2007: 1), their role being marginalised in favour of telling *his*-story, and suggests that Anne Shakespeare, "[b]y doing the right thing, by remaining silent and invisible" as generally expected of women, left a void in Shakespeare's biography, which would be filled with various speculations (2007: 4). Consequently, besides telling the "lost" story of Shakespeare's life, as well as touching upon Ben Jonson's own life narrative, Jude Morgan manages to "recover" a version of Anne Shakespeare's story, by giving her a voice and a greater part in his novel than just that of Shakespeare's estranged wife, while attempting to cast new light upon her.

Anne is the quiet wife, loyal to her husband, but also "Mistress of New Place" in Will's absence, and "a woman of the world" (Morgan 2012: 382), fighting for what is left of their marriage, as suggested by the proleptic passage in the third chapter of the novel. Through free-indirect discourse, Anne's feelings and thoughts are revealed:

> Anne accepts a gift of gloves. But beyond that lies another acceptance, and there she still shrinks. Because now she knows something terrifying about herself: that her yes is not a word but a shout; that you can set the world before her and she, for the right thing, for the right love, will tip it all over like a drunkard with an inn-table, devoted to that dreaming fire in the head. (54)

Will and Anne's relationship is far from being an ideal one, but it does start with love, although it soon goes cold and they distance themselves due to Will's relentless pursuit of his career, only to be offered a glimmer of hope for reconciliation at the end of the story. Their "stormy" marriage is announced by the cyclical structure of the novel: the first chapter opens with a proleptic passage, namely in the middle of a storm which causes a cow at Hewlands Farm, the Hathaway home, to miscarry its calf. Trying to find a way to dispose of it, Anne suggests to her brother that they should sell it to Master Shakespeare, the glover, who might find use for the calf's hide, which Will comes to collect. Thus, to make up for the lack of records on how Anne and Will came to know each other, Morgan employs fate in the guise of a terrible storm to bring the two of them together – he weaves a piece of fiction into what is expected to be the "true" story of William Shakespeare, in order to account for the missing details on their courtship, while also lending a sense of verisimilitude to it: their story starts through mere coincidence,

leading to something beautiful, but at the same time marred by issues that any family might have to face due to social and economic, as well as personal, struggles.

The novel ends with the violent wind easing down into peaceful stillness in order to reveal the storm as a "fraud" (438). Therefore, by including the word "fraud" into the narrative, Morgan might actually attempt to deconstruct the myths revolving around Shakespeare's so-called "failed" marriage, aiming an oblique attack at such theories as that claiming he hated his wife (Greer 2007: 3). The "wife-shaped void" (2007: 4) in Shakespeare's life is thus filled with a different, perhaps more sympathetic version of Anne than the ones provided by *his*-story.

The second time they meet is at one of the players' performances where, for the first time ever, Will – who is described as being "insane" about the plays (Morgan 2012: 49) – has to split his attention between the performance and Anne, whose beauty seems to capture his eye: "That smile. It didn't last as long as it should. It seemed to Will that to coax and tend that smile, to bring it into the world, would be something worth" (48). As expected, infatuation follows soon enough. Free-indirect speech is again resorted to in order to hint at Will's obvious attraction towards Anne. Morgan seems to suggest that it was actually love that brought the two of them together:

> When she had laid her hand on his shoulder everything else, thought, emotion, gave way to sensation. The breathing weight and warmth of her astonished him. It was as if he had never touched a human being before. Eighteen years old: eighteen years' worth of living, and now it seemed a long, fusty drowse before a proper waking. (49)

It may also be a desire to make up for his lack of experience as Park Honan puts it: "One may have good reasons for loving, or none, but William, it seems, was partly moved by an urge to purchase experience" (1999: 73). Nevertheless, it is further mentioned that the two of them keep "a kind of double courtship" (Morgan 2012: 62) leading to the consummation of their relationship, as they meet in the middle of nature – their private space:

> Outside is different. […] Outside he is not diminished but multiplied. Along the bare field path he conjures a company; he peoples the wood. Daphne runs from Apollo towards the Evesham road. (62)

Thus, there is a reversal of meanings, as the outside becomes the private, while the inside (i.e., the Shakespeares' house on Henley Street, the

Hathaways' farm) represents the public sphere. In this particular context, the outside might as well suggest being away from family, especially from John Shakespeare, under whose disapproval Will's genius cannot thrive. Moreover, this play on the private and the public may suggest the multifaceted nature of Will, who is always adapting to his surroundings, much like a chameleon: outside he is Anne's lover, and a creator; inside he is John Shakespeare's son, "a different version, armoured for pleasantries" (70). The wood, however, turns out to be a mere illusion towards the end of the novel: in London, Anne seeks a cow-keeper who would occasionally bring her milk, only to find that she lives in a filthy place, with a man who seems to be treating her with violence. Her illusion of London shattered, she runs back home, bumping into Will on the way, to whom she explains her going away: "I thought […] that it would be like the wood" (307). But the wood "is no place" (308), her husband replies. This contrast between the misery and violence of London and the beauty and peace of Stratford might be associated with Anne's displaced expectations of her marriage to Will. The wood, their private place, was also an illusion; things have changed.

Morgan also plays on the theories suggesting that William Shakespeare's marriage to Anne Hathaway was simply prompted by the unexpected pregnancy that ensued following their time spent together, leaving William with no other choice but to accept the responsibility (Honan 1999: 82): "She holds him, and doesn't need to say, no one needs to say, that something also has been lost: choice" (Morgan 2012: 71). This particular event reflects issues of present-day society as well, given that unplanned pregnancies, out of wedlock, are frequent and often stripping the involved parties of the luxury of choice. Moreover, their relationship now seems to be based on something else, Susannah acting as the link between them instead of love: "Will and Anne created her, but just as surely she created Will and Anne – what they are together, and must be, for always" (96).

Instead of depicting an idealised romance between Anne and Will, Morgan attempts to shape their relationship quite realistically, drawing on Shakespeare's constant travelling between Stratford and London which is obviously bound to push them further and further apart. The estrangement between Anne and Will is foreshadowed in Chapter 4, appropriately titled *Love's Metamorphoses*, in which the players mock Knell's marriage and take pity on the poor girl who married him: "'Fifteen,' Towne says. 'And now left behind in a fine house in London to sew and sing psalms'" (92). Thus, the fate that awaits a player's wife is hereby brought into the spotlight in another proleptic passage, announcing that Anne herself would have to lead such a life, as theirs is a trade that requires constant travelling and does not allow

them to settle down. Moreover, the building sexual tension between Knell and Towne, driven by the latter's jealousy, is paralleled by sequences of Anne and Will's life, following the progress from what seemed to be love to distancing and coldness: "They move about the kitchen without touching, but there is something not quite empty about the spaces between them" (95). As the heated argument between the two players reaches its climax, it is already clear that just as it is too late to save the injured, dying Knell, it is also too late to save Anne and Will's relationship from its state of declining:

> He sees his love for Anne and it is there, so clearly shaped, like a bird's nest in a tree revealed by winter bareness; and it was there all the time, but you only see it when it is empty, and nothing more can come of it. (102)

There is no helping Will: he has his mind set on his career, which is perhaps the only thing that will ever bring him satisfaction, despite his family's discontent with his constant travelling and toiling away. His love for acting, and even reading and writing, seems to triumph over his family's needs, the two sides of Will in a perpetual conflict:

> He read, and reads, alone. Oh, he presents an ill picture, this other Will who dwells apart and, in between the summer visits of the players, strings his soul along posts of dream and fantasy and invention and imitation. He looks guilty in it: everything screams that his innocence is a lie, the murdered ghost walks abroad. (98)

Thus, for all of his family's attempts at "pinning him down" and John Shakespeare's pushing his daughter-in-law to stop him from spending time with the players, Will "was a man at his own government; and if he chose to walk up to the Swan to talk to the players after his work was done, there was nothing to stop him" (104). Anne, however, remains faithful and loyal to him.

It appears that troubles are far from being over in Will and Anne's marriage: despite a blood promise made to Anne before leaving for London, Will gradually starts to give in to temptation: first, he seems to be attracted to Madame Vautrollier, a French woman and Richard Field's wife-to-be, mostly due to the aura of exoticism that surrounds her – perhaps a hint at the Dark Lady of the sonnets. However, it is later proven that the muse is actually Isabelle Berger, another French woman who came to seek refuge in London and with whom Will cheats on Anne. Indeed, it seems that Shakespeare did live among French Huguenots (Honan 1999: 99), but there is no record of any Isabelle Berger – therefore, the character might be the

product of Morgan's imagination, introduced in the story in order to question the identity of one of Shakespeare's muses, namely the Dark Lady.

Will is constantly torn between Stratford and London, between his family and his career:

> Over there, the husband, loving but absent and therefore failing: over there, the father who thought his children looked huge and alien; over here, the man of the theatre lusting for new lines and loud, quick-witted citizen-crowds, and over here, too, someone grim and purposeful, thinking: Put money in your purse, aim, make right, win – win over your father else nothing won will ever count. (Morgan 2012: 164)

He does eventually win his father over, indeed, by managing to acquire the coat of arms that he so much desired. With Anne, however, it is a different story: he tries to bring her and the children to London, but, as Hamnet catches an illness, Anne feels that she has to return home, where the children were safe and healthy – London is no place for them and they feel foreign there. In Stratford, Hamnet passes away, causing a rift between Anne and Will that might never be fixed. Although there are no records of the cause of death, just suppositions (Potter 2012: 204), in the novel it is said to have been the plague. Anne, however, blames Will for taking them to London where Hamnet supposedly contracted the infection. Their estrangement is also worsened by the fact that Will was away when his son died, therefore not by his family's side in such difficult moments.

As the visits home become less and less frequent, Anne starts to suspect foul play on Will's part. Thus, she asks Edmund, Will's little adoring brother, to help her in her quest: as Edmund is in London struggling to become an actor like his brother, Anne sends him on a "mission" to find out who Will's mistress is. Edmund, ever faithful to Will, tries to assure Anne of his loyalty to her. However, Anne senses that Edmund is covering up the truth, so she travels all alone to London, to find it out herself. In emphasising Anne's jealousy, Morgan employs intertextuality, specifically drawing on two major elements in *Macbeth*: the vision of the dagger and Lady Macbeth's obsession with her bloody hands:

> Queen of jealousy, she lay drowning in wonderment in the bug-rid inn bed, imagining Will in someone's arms, and the someone almost took shape when she dreamed, and woke with a start putting out her hand, purposefully. Doing what? She seemed to feel or see, with the melded senses of sleep, a dagger. Was she putting it away, or taking it to her? Was this – she lurched up – blood? (Morgan 2012: 414)

After a conversation with Isabelle Berger, who misleads Anne into believing that Will was surely spending time with Matthew, the boy actor (421) – thus touching upon issues of Shakespeare's sexuality – then barging into what she thought to have been Will with a man in his bed (i.e., a very sick Jack Towne whom he was actually taking care of), Will and Anne eventually settle down and talk:

> At the window the wind stops its violence and gives way to a clear stillness, and the threatened storm reveals itself a fraud. Just as with passion, the truest thing about it is the peace that follows it. (2012: 438)

The open ending of the novel, thus, leaves room for hope in their relationship, hope that things can still be mended as the story comes full circle.

Conclusions

Through Jude Morgan's *The Secret Life of William Shakespeare*, a new version of Will's story emerges, depicting him as a man with an incredible lust for writing and acting, perhaps even for fame, who makes great sacrifices for his career, going against his family's wishes and leaving them behind in Stratford in his relentless pursuit. Nonetheless, he is a man that still has hope for reconciliation with his wife and children, the open ending leaving room for the reader's imagination to further fill in the gaps in order to complete Shakespeare's story.

Moreover, Morgan does not stop at *his*-story in his portrayals of Will's, Ben Jonson's and even, in part, the players' lives, as Anne Shakespeare's story is also restored. And he does so skilfully, through the fragmentation and intermingling of their life narratives, drawing parallels (i.e., between Shakespeare's family and Jonson's), incorporating references to other texts in order to enlarge the perspective, while constantly challenging notions such as "truth, fact, reality," and frequently employing the free-indirect discourse to allow his characters their own voices.

Consequently, William Shakespeare is (re)presented as a literary genius worthy of praise and admiration even from scholars like Jonson, as well as a human being, capable of making errors and flawed in every way, but who was and still is perhaps the greatest poet and playwright of the Renaissance – among many other successful writers. Although Shakespeare's talent brought him immortality and transformed him, in time, into a high-culture icon, a "darling" of the elites, Jude Morgan, like other writers nowadays, strives to bring Shakespeare back to the masses or, at

least, to put forth a more "balanced" representation in which the private and the public, the highbrow and the lowbrow, Shakespeare the man and Shakespeare the artist could not be so easily separated.

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The Importance and Consequences of War Photography

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Abstract
War photographs speak of war through stories. Stories of people they depict, usually during the most painful situations of their lives. Thanks to these photographs, we are able to learn about the suffering of others. However, few people know those standing behind the lens, risking their lives and health, so they could tell us these stories. This article focuses on the influence of war photography on photographers' mental health. It wants to point out the relevance of war photography, which is important even today (especially in relation to the war in Ukraine, i.e., affecting us deeply), and learn about the inner world of photojournalists and their perception of their work. The article addresses the issue of the psychological effect of war photography on its authors. The objective is to demonstrate the psychological impacts of war photography and map its consequences. The article points out the development of war photography in the world and in Slovakia; it also refers to the pioneers of this field. The issue of psychological impacts of war photography, its origins and contribution, the ethical code of media pictures, as well as current perception of war photography are all analysed. The study further addresses the topical conflict in Ukraine and the work of photojournalists that have spent several days there risking their lives to bring us a visual testimony directly from the battlefront. It is also worth mentioning that at the time of writing this paper, i.e., at the beginning of April 2022, 12 journalists have been confirmed dead.

Keywords: *post-traumatic stress disorder, psychological impact, war photography, war photojournalism*

Introduction

War is as old as mankind itself. From prehistoric times till today, people wage wars against each other, whether over land or for political or religious reasons. In the past, war represented an inevitable part of every emperor's rule. Nowadays, however, war is not only an internal issue of soldiers and people at its centre. Thanks to photography, which brings testimony of every atrocity, war has become known to people all around the world. The effect and contribution of war photography and its authors are undeniable.

Despite this, it seems that its images have made us somewhat numb. Through photography, each event naturally becomes more realistic; however, the shock from the first look at the photograph fades with each consequent look. Familiarity with atrocity brought by photography makes

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the horrible seem more ordinary (Sontag, 2002a: 22). For this reason, the demarche addresses the characteristics of war photography, clarifies its basic terms and shows its influence on the psychological health of the journalists. Mention of the historical origins of war photography and its main representatives, who have remained relevant in the field until today, will also be made.

War photography and its psychological impact on journalists

War photographs reflect the reality that we do not want to see (Sontag, 2002b: 12). They are very important, and their primary role is to inform the world about atrocities inflicted on people. Associated Press, Magnum Photo or VU are among the agencies that closely cooperate with war journalists. These are sometimes referred to as documentarists or reporters, or simply just photographers.

Accuracy, truthfulness, and objectivity. Those are three main conditions that war photography must meet according to the journalism code of ethics (Lábová & Láb, 2009: 135).

Psychological impact of war photography

Mental health is just as important as physical health. For years, it had been pushed into the background and disorders, anxiety or depression had not been talked about. People felt shame or tried to pretend that nothing is happening. Being a war photographer, just as being a soldier, also brings consequences in the form of mental illness. Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, was the first to describe the "post-traumatic stress disorder". This term refers to various pathological manifestations that emerge after undergoing serious phases in life. One of these could also be the so-called syndrome of war veterans (Zdeněk et al., 2019: 53). Photojournalists or Doctors Without Borders are exposed to the same syndrome. The Vietnam War brought an understanding of the concept of post-traumatic stress disorder and some initial ways of its treatment. Similarly, it has enabled the identification of certain pathological manifestations of this disorder (Kume, 2006: 65). A good example of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and its consequences is the story of photographer Kevin Carter. As a result of public pressure and the consequences of what he had seen, he made the radical decision to commit suicide.

Based on the probing of this issue, it is apparent that only a few experts study the psychological state that war photographers face, while many of them balance on the edge between life and death or mental health in order to bring us images directly from the centre of war conflicts. Anthony

Feinstein, author of the book *Shooting War: 18 Profiles of Conflict Photographers*, a documentarist and professor, who in the 1980s worked in the largest independent non-profit organization, Doctors Without Borders, in northern Namibia and southern Angola, observed men's reactions to war. He participated in making a documentary film that maps the work of war photographers and their experiences from the front lines. This documentary contains statements from war photojournalists who have encountered burnout syndrome or feelings of purposelessness. They even asked themselves why they still were and whether they were still important (Feinstein, 2018). He starts his book with an image of Tim Page, a photographer who mapped the Vietnam War. He describes his external injuries, struggles with drug addiction, and endless depression. Feinstein very aptly illustrates the psychological wounds that men and women repeatedly face during war (Crawford, 2019). In this connection, it is relevant to mention that a long-term absence of positive emotions and repeated exposure to stressful and depressing situations might weaken a human being and provide space for the emergence of various mental disorders, which can then also lead to an emergence of physical diseases (Zdeněk et al., 2019: 118). In the interview, Feinstein further appeals to the news agencies or magazines which are, in his opinion, morally responsible to look after their photographers, not just physically but also emotionally. He stresses that this profession is becoming more and more dangerous because photographers now are targeted by insurgents just as often as soldiers (Feinstein, 2018).

Consequences of war photography

In this subsection, the consequences of war photography are viewed from two angles. The first one would be its effect on the lives of photojournalists and the second one is the results it brings when seen by the masses.

In her book, Susan Sontag (2002a: 22) mentions that sometimes photographs are not enough to influence the public opinion on war. Despite this, many photographers risk their mental health and even their lives to change this. As stated above, photographers in war zones go through situations that often affect them for life (if they don't lose their life on the battlefield). Ashley Gilbertson, who photographed refugees in Indonesia or Kurdish population in northern Iraq under Saddam Hussein's rule, has admitted that it is impossible to photograph the most traumatic situations there and remain unchanged (McCauley, 2012).

Having commented on post-traumatic stress disorder that occurs among war veterans, journalists or many others affected by war, a further

attempt is made to contemplate whether it is possible for these people to reintegrate into society.

Most war veterans suffering from PTSD show similar schemes of behaviour. They are more prone to addiction, either to alcohol or hard drugs. They avoid sleep to eliminate nightmares. They are also victims of self-blame, which results in further deterioration of their mental state (Meyer, 2018: 3). War photographers are faced with the same consequences.

War photography pioneers

War photography basically emerged from journalist photography. *Roger Fenton*, the British photographer who photographed the Crimean war (1853 – 1856), is considered one of the first war photojournalists (Mulligan & Wooters, 2012: 513-514). His dispatch to the front was purely a political-strategic matter of the British Crown. The Crimean war was becoming increasingly unpopular, so the Brits sent their well-liked photographer Roger Fenton (allegedly at the instigation of Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's husband) to give a different, more positive impression of this undoubtedly controversial war (Sontag, 2002b: 46). As this concerned the British reputation, it is more than clear that Fenton had not photographed dying children, suffering women, or field hospitals full of incapacitated soldiers. It can, therefore, be stated that his photography served as governmental propaganda (Mulligan & Wooters, 2012: 513-514). His photographs had not been found interesting or beneficial, so he quit photographing and his name had been forgotten.

Other pioneers were *Mathew Brady* and his associates mentioned by Sontag in her book. They were the first photographers who tried to show the atrocities of war, yet they did not succeed at weakening the enthusiasm of young boys to enlist in the army (Sontag, 2002a: 24). The Civil War in the USA, also known as the war between the North and the South or war between the Union and the Confederacy, became known worldwide also thanks to him and his work, "Soldiers on the Battlefield".

Another very well-known photographer was *John McCosh*, who was engaged in the Anglo-Sikh War from 1848-49. He had made a photographic series, and had actually been photographing before Roger Fenton.

The 20th century started with the confirmation of objectivity as a golden rule of journalism. It was a blend of artistic passion for facts and aesthetic presentation also known as literary journalism. This age provided space for many journalists and photographers, also because the 20th century was a century of wars. This era gave an opportunity to many, even to women who became pioneers of this profession. During this period, a photographer

became an important adjunct for every journalist, and together they would cover war events. Photojournalism, supported by the Hearst and Pulitzer newspaper chains, had finally come of age (Rudner, 1981: 137).

One of the first wars of the golden age of photojournalism was the Spanish Civil War. It is said that it was a rehearsal for World War II. Post-war Spain was left destroyed, people were impoverished and tired. However, it is fascinating mainly because of its popularity among the world-renowned artists of the time. People from around the world travelled to Spain, either as military assistants or journalists who wanted to record the atrocities of fascism. Spain represented a start for many journalists, one of whom was also *David Chim Seymour* who became famous for photographing this particular war.

Another famous war photographer, who collaborated with war journalist Martha Gellhorn and with Ernest Hemingway, is *Robert Capa*, a photographer of Hungarian nationality, which he often mentioned as a reason for his work being successful. Demand for photographs from Spain was very high, and so the magazines had to also turn to freelance photographers, as the journalists were covering radicalizing Europe. Robert Capa had learned his trade by watching the massacre in Spain. In 1947, he himself said: "I have become a photographer during the Spanish Civil War" (Rudner, 1981: 138). Surprisingly, Capa had been unemployed for almost a year afterwards, but his determination brought him to another war. After the outbreak of World War II, he started to work as a photojournalist for Life and Collier's magazine in Europe and northern Africa. He was one of the few witnesses of landings in Normandy and brought very authentic pictures from there. He knew that documenting human suffering would be his life. His employers and friends admitted his ability to foresee and capture an event at just the right moment. For Capa, the camera was his best friend, whether in the war in Spain, World War II, the Arab-Israeli War or Indochina War. With his friends Henri Cartier-Bresson, George Roger, and David Seymour, he co-founded the photographic agency *Magnum Photos* in 1947. His colleague, John Steinbeck said something very important if we want to better understand his state of mind: "He proved to us that a man can live by this medium and still be true to himself. His pictures are not accidents. The emotion in them did not come by chance" (Rudner, 1981: 137). His work, however, also brought about the end of his life. He died while documenting the war of liberation of French Indochina. *Death of a Loyalist Militiaman* is one of the most famous Robert Capa's photographs. Despite this, it has not avoided controversy about its authenticity. The photograph depicts a Spanish soldier being shot and falling to the ground with a rifle in his hand.

The opinion that this scene had been staged appeared in 1975. Historian Phillip Knightley offered a hypothesis that the profession of a war photojournalist has been presenting a distortion of the truth since its origins (Lábová & Láb, 2009: 40).

Similarly, *Alexander Gardner*, who photographed the American Civil War, used the body of the same soldier in two different photographs. After the effort to show the true face of war in the Spanish Civil War or World War II came three conflicts that once again became tests of its strength: the Vietnam, the Falklands, and the Gulf wars (Brothers, 1997: 202). The Vietnam War was a much-discussed conflict very harsh for both sides. There were many casualties among the civilians, as well as among the American soldiers. Vietnam War was the most unpopular war in American history.

One of many photographers who tried to show the horrors of the Vietnam War was *Larry Burrows*. His photos had been published in *Life* magazine. The profession of a war photographer had cost him and his colleagues their lives (Brothers, 1997: 208).

We must not forget many female war photojournalists across history. To name just a few, mention will be made of *Gerda Taro*, whose work cost her life, or *Francoise Demulder*. She was on the front line in Vietnam, Lebanon, Iraq, Cambodia, and Ethiopia. In 1976, she was the first woman to win the World Press Photo award (Shemesh, 2008). By the way, women – war photographers are those, to whom the exhibition FEMMES PHOTOGRAPHES DE GUERRE (WOMEN WAR PHOTOGRAPHERS) in Paris, taking place from March 8 to December 31, 2022, is dedicated. It includes these women: Lee Miller, Gerda Taro, Catherine Leroy, Christine Spengler, Françoise Demulder, Susan Meiselas, Carolyn Cole, Anja Niedringhaus.

Contemporary war photography

As mentioned before, war is as old as humankind itself. However, people have not learned from their mistakes and still look for something that divides them rather than something they might have in common. Even now, when we think we are civilized and advanced, unimaginable atrocities are happening in various parts of the world (ultimately, not even that far – right now it is happening in the midst of Europe, in Ukraine). And even today there are people who give up their lives for the profession of war photojournalist, in order to inform the outside world about things we turn a blind eye to.

September 11, 2001 not only brought the attack on the American Twin Towers, but also a new dimension of combat in the form of terrorist attacks. The subsequent war in Iraq was long and exhausting. It did not bring

about the establishment of democracy that the Americans spoke of, but only further conflict between the Shiite and Sunni Muslims. The Shiite majority has reinforced its influence in many countries of the Middle East and translated its hatred into further wars (Žák, 2018).

Today, wars take place in many areas. The most known conflicts of recent history are, e.g., the war in Syria, the Upper Karabakh conflict, the war in Ukraine or in several African countries. Brutal methods of warfare still remain, but, today, they occur under different circumstances. The age of information warfare has begun. In the last two decades, we have been witnessing a significant change in armed conflicts. It seems that the 21st century is an era of nuclear weapons development and enormous armaments (Tumber & Webster, 2006: 14).

Ethics of photography in the media

Information technology has opened many doors and its progress has undoubtedly also influenced the media. The technology of photo editing has caused the fact that the altered image is indistinguishable from the original. Based on this fact, the media have started to adopt new ethical codes regulating the usage of visual materials (Lábová & Láb, 2009: 135). The following subchapter addresses the question of media digitalization in contemporary war photography, mentioning two examples of how the digitalization of photographs caused one author problems and distrust in their professionalism and another one fame for his idea of placing war images into famous metropolises around the world.

The ethical codes themselves started to be adopted in the 1920s. "They could be in a form of non-binding recommendations or be, for instance, a part of a journalist's employment contract" (135). Digitalization has brought a gradual change in the code of a journalist themselves. Before, it addressed mainly the journalist's behaviour, the importance of objectivity, or the whole process of taking a photograph. New codes are primarily aimed at what happens with the photograph after it has been taken. As mentioned before, it serves to lay down the rules, so that a photograph is not altered and presented as original.

Based on many resources, the majority of news agencies have been found to have their own ethical codes. "Photographs are trusted by our readers to be an accurate recording of an event," states the first paragraph of The Washington Post's ethical code (138). One can, however, question the scope of influence of a journalist's ideology on the requirement of objectivity.

Another factor that plays a significant role in objectivity is political propaganda. The most notable example of political propaganda would

definitely be World War II and the German minister of propaganda, Joseph Goebbels. Propagandistic photography is usually taken and published with the purpose to celebrate or strengthen the established regime, or destroy it. Working-class photographers are a good example. They started publishing their photographs after the Great Depression, supporting the advancing Bolshevik revolution. This movement of working-class photographers was spreading across Europe mainly in the 1930s (Mrázková, 1985: 118).

Contemporary international and local war photography

Contemporary war photography is definitely associated with the name *James Natchwey*, who has spent more than four decades documenting military conflicts. He was inspired by war photographs from Vietnam, as well as the civil rights movement in the USA. As a photographer, he went from war to war, and this fact has also affected his mental state. In his memorial interview, he says he manages his experiences with difficulty. He does not discuss his memories with people who have not been in similar situations.

At the beginning of his career, he worked in a small periodical in New Mexico, later he became a photographer for *Time* magazine. He has received many awards, e.g., Word Press Photo Award, Martin Luther King Award or Cannon Photo Award (Ruffo & Mancini, 2015). He says that doing this job, one has to be willing to face not only physical but also emotional risks (Hamilton, 2020). His life and contribution to the photographic world is described in a documentary filmed by director Christian Frei. It is an interesting image of a man who has dedicated his whole life to his work. At the same time, it points out the fragility of psychological state even though we are talking about a professional photographer. In the documentary, he asks himself questions that trouble him, especially the one of whether others' suffering was the key to his success and whether it is right to earn money from the suffering of others (Frei, 2001).

Kevin Carter was another famous war photographer. A man who had witnessed injustice bestowed upon the black community since childhood, Carter had been used to powerful topics, as he documented the consequences of Apartheid in South Africa. He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his photograph of a starving little girl in Sudan with a vulture sitting and waiting behind her. He was a member of the so-called Bang Bang Club, whose name was supposed to evoke gunshots. The aforementioned loner James Natchwey also joined this group. On March 26, 1993, the aforesaid photograph appeared on the cover page of the New York Times. The photograph had not only brought its author fame, but also criticism and hate. The comments of people were dominated by the question of why he

did not help the girl but only took pictures of her misery. The girl from the photograph survived, but it is not known what happened to her afterwards. Carter, however, committed suicide only a few months after he had taken the photograph. He locked himself in his car and poisoned himself with exhaust fumes. Public pressure and the death of his colleague *Ken Oosterbroek* only amplified the depressive episodes he had suffered. His suicide note only proves the bad psychological state he was in. He wrote that he was haunted by memories of war, and he was hoping to join his friend Ken up above (Mironov, 2009).

Contemporary photography today does not lie solely in more criticism on social networks, but also in the question of its digitalization. On March 31, 2003, a photograph from Iraq appeared on the front page of the Los Angeles Times, its author being *Brian Walski.* It was a picture of an American soldier warning a group of Iraqis to take cover, and a civilian carrying his child in his arms. The photograph was a great success, but after detailed examination, it had been found that it was a composite of two different pictures. Walski apologized publicly and stated that he had not thought about ethics in this case because he wanted to show the world the best possible shot. This fact has initiated a controversial discussion about the credibility of the profession of a war photojournalist (Lábová & Láb, 2009: 55).

Digitalization, however, need not be just negative; it can also be beneficial. This is what war photographer *Patrick Chauvel* attempts to do in order to convey the war to people as much as possible. In 2006, he started to work on photomontages that were meant to bring war right to the streets of Paris. He prepared a series of photographs from Chechnya, Afghanistan, Israel, and Iraq, and placed all these images on the streets of European cities. The photographs looked very authentic. His aim was to show the general public that such conflicts could also concern us (57).

When speaking of contemporary war photography, one must not forget to mention very active Czech photojournalists *Markéta Kutilová* and *Lenka Klicperová.* In the book *In Sight of the Islamic State*, they describe their journey to the areas controlled by the Islamic State. They both struggle with the incomprehension of others regarding their decision to go to these war zones. Women are rarer in this profession and the conservative society still sees it as a man's job. Kutilová and Klicperová have made it through many expeditions together, whether in Kongo, India, Haiti, or Syrian Kurdistan (Klicperová & Kutilová, 2015: 11). Currently, they are both documenting the war in Ukraine, attacked by Russia on February 24, 2022.

Figure 1: Lenka Klicperová – Russian bombs hit civilian houses in Malyn, Ukraine
Source: https://www.all-about-photo.com/photo-articles/photo-article/1173/my-ukrainian-stories-by-lenka-klicperova?fbclid=IwAR0AWlJg2e5ja2D8eECr8BB-g4c_PStbavUJhv_dae_DrybXRgncQXlb9RM

From the Slovak war photojournalists, one must mention *Ján Husár,* who has mapped many world conflicts – in Ukraine, Iraq, or Gaza. He has been doing this job for a long time. He also contributed to National Geographic and History Channel, for which he made a feature documentary in South Africa (Jamrichová, 2021). He himself implied that some situations have a harmful impact on psychological state, but these impacts are not felt right away. He has risked his life in many military conflicts and still he encountered opinions that his profession is about manipulation (Ježová, 2019). He is currently covering the war in Ukraine.

Figure 2: Ján Husár – from the series Born under Fire, Kyiv, Ukraine
Source:
https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=2171344909689266&set=pb.100004413337457.-2207520000..&type=3

Staying on the subject of the current conflict, famous AP (The Associated Press) photographer *Emilio Morenatti* is also in Ukraine. The Spanish photographer has received many awards for his work. He has years of experience in war zones – for the AP, he worked in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Israel, and other places. In 2009, he was injured in a bomb blast in Afghanistan and lost his left leg. His pictures are world-renowned, for example, a shot of a crying woman from February 25 taken during the Kyiv bombing made the front page of the *New York Times* and many other world media. In an article for the AP, Morenatti speaks of how he sometimes feels like he would give up all his work and awards (including the Pulitzer Prize) just to walk on his own two legs again. However, he realizes that this injury has played its role in shaping who he is today. At the same time, he wonders, if disability could give us more than it has taken. He has been looking for an answer in conversations with soldiers and now Paralympians, who have also been wounded in combat and had their limbs amputated – for example, with sprinter Luis Puertas who lost both his legs in Iraq.

Figure 3: Emilio Morenatti – Iconic photography from Kyiv, Ukraine, Friday, Feb. 25, 2022
Source: https://twitter.com/emiliomorenatti/status/1497107708927000599

Let us continue with the topic of war in Ukraine. The world has learnt about one of the devastated cities, which had been cut off from electricity, water, food, or gas supply and was on the verge of humanitarian catastrophe – Mariupol – thanks to authentic photographs and brave photographers. The last two who got stuck there got on the list of Russian enemies: *Mstyslav Chernov* is a videographer and photojournalist for The Associated Press (AP), *Evgeniy Maloletka* is a Ukrainian photographer, a freelancer working for the AP. They have described the dangers of their profession and direct experiences from the two weeks they had spent there for the AP news. We have learned, for example, how extremely difficult it is to document the horrors that take place in such a place, but also to get the photographs out to the world, so all could know what is happening. They describe how complicated it was to send the photographed and filmed materials in a city where radio, television, and cell phone towers have been destroyed. Mstyslav Chernov states that it results in an absence of information, which accomplishes two goals: the first one is chaos, the second one is impunity. He had realized that unless there is proof of the bombed buildings and dying people, the aggressors could do whatever they wanted. "That's why we took such risks to be able to send the world what we saw, and that's what made Russia angry enough to hunt us down. I have never, never felt that breaking the silence was so important," writes Chernov (2022).

Figure 4: Evgeniy Maloletka – Russian bombing of a maternity and children's hospital in Mariupol on 9 March, 2022
Source: https://khpg.org/en/1608810176

He also recalls how people begged them to photograph or film them, so their close ones would know they were still alive. These are the kinds of situations that show the power and importance of the medium of photography. "I have seen so much death that I was filming without almost taking it in," adds the AP video journalist. The journalists do not only talk about the dangers of their work but also about the fact that while they were in isolation, their work was being discredited – when the Russian Embassy in London used social networks to post a statement that the photograph of a pregnant woman had been staged. These are also the problems that photojournalists face in times of information warfare (Kubínyi & Višňovský, 2021: 332). After this accusation and a call from their editor, the AP journalists went to the hospitals to find the photographed women and prove their existence. They realized that the footage must have been powerful enough to provoke a response from the Russian government (Chernov, 2022).

Finally, one can see below photographs from the Ukrainian town of Bucha, taken by photographer *Vadim Ghirda.*

Figure 5: Vadim Ghirda – Bucha, Ukraine, Saturday, April 2, 2022
Source: https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-kyiv-world-news-europe-5e85aac62d46a080f35f802f5ce19443

After the Russian army started to withdraw and Ukrainian military units returned to the cities, they found streets full of killed civilians. The published images triggered a reaction from world leaders. The spokesperson for the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Liz Throssell, stated that "[...] the photos of bodies of civilians lying in the streets of Bucha are extremely disturbing, while she pointed out that deliberate killing of civilians is a war crime" (Filo, 2022). They have not only caused outrage in almost the entire world, but they have also become a base for discussions about further, more restrictive sanctions against Russia. Yet again, this proves the great importance of photographs from war zones.

War photography does not only impact its authors, but also its recipients. Just as some photojournalists sustained physical injuries and lost their limbs or even their lives because of their job, others are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Military psychologist Ivan Sopoliga mentions this disorder in his interview for Denník N in connection to the war in Ukraine. He refers to a Canadian study that confirms that "[...] when you have strong ties to a home or any place you are from or where your close ones are, the occurrence of post-traumatic stress disorder is significantly lower. Individuals with good social background can suffer from the

disorder, but it is less common, or its course is much faster" (Horák, 2022). Although he is talking about soldiers, not journalists, based on the previous sections, we can state that it also concerns photojournalists on the frontline. When your name is on an enemy list, when you risk your life to bring authentic pictures, when a certain part of society discredits it, and you are overcome by a feeling that your work is pointless… All of this affects the emotions and behaviour of a photojournalist (and every participant in war). Andrej Bán, a contemporary Slovak photojournalist, also talks about his experiences from war zones, as well as his perception of war photography: "One of the refugees once showed me terrible photos and videos of his close ones and acquaintances. In one moment, I turned my head away, I said I'd had enough. Not as a photographer, but as a human being, I cannot look at it and it does not make me a better person in any way. James Nachtwey has a book *Inferno* that is similarly brutal. I started flipping through it and put it away after a while. I will never buy it, although I respect its author very much. It was beyond what I can take seeing, and I have seen quite a lot in my life" (Močková & Gális, 2015). He even admitted that he had had some psychological problems for some time, he had no motivation to do anything, avoided his archives, and only participated in non-conflict reporting (Močková & Gális, 2015).

Brutal images also have an indisputable impact on the percipients. There is usually a warning at the beginning of articles that contain such war photographs. On social networks, such photographs are also hidden, they can only be viewed after clicking the sentence: "Sensitive content. This photo may contain violent or graphic content. View photo." We are thus able to choose whether we can handle seeing these images or not.

Conclusions

War photography has become an intrinsic part of the history of this world, just as the war itself. War is not only about battle strategy or weapons and their development. First of all, it is full of human stories and suffering that could often go unnoticed, if it weren't for photographers and journalists who are trying to give these stories their voice and shape. Today, it might be different from the times when most of the artists and journalists from around the world ran to Spain during the Spanish Civil War to inform and call on the world, or when they photographed and wrote about Allied landings in Normandy, or when they informed people about the war in Yugoslavia. War itself has changed just as fast as the world has under the influence of technology. It might also be partly true that we are more immune to the images of suffering and dying because we have got used to seeing violence.

The speed of this world does not let us follow the suffering of others thoroughly. For this reason, the work of war photojournalists is even more admirable. First, they must be people of great tenacity that are not afraid to go into the unknown, in order to provide information despite the criticism that they sometimes face. Therefore, the objective of this article was to not only describe and investigate the extent of the psychological effect of war on photojournalists but also to examine how this profession has changed.

In the introduction, the origins of war photography and the psychological impact of war on photojournalists were briefly addressed. In the following sections, war photography across history, its pioneers and contemporary Slovak and international war photojournalists have been dealt with. It is said that seeing once is better than hearing a hundred times. When we look at pictures from the frontline, it touches not only us – the percipients, but it also strongly affects the people who create these contents and, in their way, also participate in war. The work of war journalists has a significant impact on their emotions and behaviour. All the horrors we see indirectly, they see right from "the front row".

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Displaced: Canadian Mindscapes in Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*

Lidia Mihaela NECULA*

Abstract

Simply put, hyperreality is used to denote something that does not yet exist in the sense of being undeniably demonstrable. According to Jean Baudrillard in Simulacra and Simulation *(1981), hyperreality is a state where reality has been replaced by simulacra, meaning that what is real and what is fictional is indistinguishable. Equally, hyperreality starts as soon as one replaces the question of 'if' by 'when'. Therein, in Margaret Atwood's* Alias Grace*, it becomes quite difficult to establish whether or not Grace Marks is innocent, pure and wrongly accused of the horrible murders of her employer Thomas Kinnear and his housekeeper, Nancy Montgomery. Likewise, Grace's memory (which, strangely enough, is referred to in terms of its absence rather than its presence since she is supposedly suffering from amnesia) is some sort of virtual reality, an entire world in itself, where Grace can appear to be anything she wants to be. By constantly overlapping the Canadian landscape, Grace's subconscious enables a window into the world within, one of the past, the present and the future, some sort of interface between three different psychological entities with their corresponding and symbolic representations of the landscape.*

The present paper looks into the novel from behind the lens of the Canadian landscape (although scarce in occurrences) as a metonymy of hyperreal mindscapes: doubly displaced both geographically (she is an Irish immigrant), and mentally (she seems to be manifesting a form of multiple personality disorder), Grace simultaneously exists in hyperreal mindscapes, mimicking and replicating, stating and questioning, challenging readers who are left adrift in a textual world where the boundaries between reality and representation become blurred.

Keywords: *hyperreality, simulacra, fiction, Canadian landscape, hyperreal mindscapes, geographical displacement, mental displacement*

Crafting Selves

Any country's landscape, past or present, imaginary or real, re-created or re-presented, might be viewed as an emblematic site and thus a key player in the heritage process of cultural identity; it seeps inside of us. Attempting the portrayal of the Canadian landscapes recurrent in Margaret Atwood's novel *Alias Grace* means re-mapping the geographical territories of a country that is *absent* in the *present* in its past form, i.e. nineteenth-century Canada, and which, by means of fallible scraps of memories or subjective portraying

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ficelles, help render the picture of a hyperreal Canadian landscape, a multiplicity of mindscapes that allow for the interplay of such forces as identity and memory.

Seen like this, it becomes clear that we internalize our surroundings so that the line between out there and in here dissolves entirely: landscapes are not echoes coming from the world, nor are they mirrors that we hold up to the world, reflecting its shapes and structures immediately and without distortion, but rather fabrications of our own imagination, creations of our own making, even though this does not occur entirely of our own choosing.

A character in its own right, the Canadian landscape in *Alias Grace* emphasizes the significance of the past in the contemporary construction of Grace Marks's identity narrative and draws attention to the powerful role of the past events of the nineteenth century as sites of cultural heritage.

The re-presentation of Canadian landscapes is mediated through particular circumstances both of the maker (as is Grace's case, who reconstructs from memory) and of the viewer (as is Simon's case, who is an observer); as such, the convergent representations of the landscapes are never the result of a private experience with nature, nor is it a one-sided experience especially since there is this duality of the re-projecting narrative threads that converge to wholly recreate the moment of its beholding, the same simulacrum which Baudrillard defines as that which replaces reality with its representations.

The plot

In her novel, Margaret Atwood rewrites the much-disputed story of Canada's infamous nineteenth-century convicted murderess Grace Marks, a guilty, cold-blooded conniving woman to some, and an innocent victim to others.

A sample of historical fiction to the point where historical records were indeed accessible, Atwood's novel seems to bring to the fore issues of gender and class roles, identity, truth, and the nature of memory, without apparently looking too much into portrayals of landscapes. And yet, set against a fuzzy background, although scarce, these portrayals of the Canadian landscape are an ever-evolving and changing organism that grows in shape and intensity as Grace's story gets told, being mapped in the same analeptical order as Grace's story, retracing that which is absent (bordering on Grace's memory and all that was once lived and has become a mere representation) in that which is present (her own re-presentations of the landscape outside).

On the side of history

Keeping to the historical facts, Thomas Kinnear, a wealthy landowner, and Nancy Montgomery, his housekeeper and mistress, are murdered in July 1843. Grace, working as a maid for Mr Kinnear on the day of the killings, claims that she has no recollection of what happened, despite being present at the house at the time. Only 16 years old, Grace is on trial alongside Kinnear's former stable hand, James McDermott, and she is eventually put on death row for her role in the murder of Thomas Kinnear. Grace's life is spared and her death sentence is changed to life imprisonment thanks to the advocacy of her attorney and sympathetic reform groups. Found guilty, James McDermott is hung on November 21st, 1843.

In 1859, a group of reformers and spiritualists seeking a pardon for Grace ask for the help of the young, ambitious and promising American medical doctor, Simon Jordan, who travels to Kingston Penitentiary to examine Grace. The reform group relies heavily on his findings for their petition. Simon's motivations are complicated because he is passionate about the emerging field of psychiatric therapies. In assisting Grace to recall the murders, he aims to get at the truth and prove his methods correct. Additionally, Simon plans to use Grace as an example to attract wealthy, powerful patrons to his next project, a mental health centre, after demonstrating success in his treatment of her.

On the side of fiction

Grace's first-person narrative is intermingled with Dr Simon Jordan's third-person one. The novel begins in 1851 and covers a period of 25 years, but most of the events take place in 1859 and are told under the form of analepses which Grace unfolds to Simon. Part of the story is told in letters, many of which are exchanged between Simon and his mother, Simon and his friend Edward Murchie, or Simon and Reverend Verringer, and which can be said to function like ficelles that serve to round off not only the rest of Grace's story, but also the missing hues and brushes of colour of the Canadian landscape. Reality exists but is distorted in representation, as in their re-contextual-izations, these landscape portrayals present a glamourised and, at times, idealised image.

Landscaping Canada through Irish lenses

Re-constructed mainly from their absence, Grace's portrayals of the Canadian landscape are of a dynamic entity type subjected to abrupt changes and unpredictable disruptions: the latter is construed as a living and breathing organism with a geographical body (predominantly made up of

forms of relief such as Ontario Lake, hills and valleys) and a more sensorial body (made up of the weather phenomena, the flora or the fauna occurring in certain areas).

And yet, they are eloquently present in their absence! With a view to clearing her name and proving her innocence, Grace is recounting past events entangled in an amnesic memory: her early perceptions and later re-projections of the landscape are constantly overlapped by the journey back in time, which opens a door into her subconscious, thus allowing for a gaze at the world within, the Holy trinity of her past, present and future lives that are accommodated by "her earthly shell. Her fleshly garment" (Atwood 2019: 468)

In limbo

Physically trapped in the present of 1851, by which time she will have been imprisoned for 16 years, Grace Marks, "daughter of John Marks […] a Stone-mason by trade" (110) is currently working in the house of the Governor's wife where she is mostly observed from the standpoint of curiosity as her seeming yet intriguing madness endows her with qualities that almost make her enviable:

> she manifests 'a composure that a duchess might envy', she is a woman 'thoroughly self-contained', 'her voice is low and melodious, and more cultivated than is usual in a servant – a trick she has learned no doubt through her long service in the house of her social superiors; and she retains barely a trace of the Northern Irish accent with which she must have arrived, although that is not so remarkable, as she was only a child at the time and has now spent more than half her life on this continent. (154)

Seemingly musing on issues that are hardly expected to be of interest to a low-class ignorant and prisoner like her (although, according to Mary Whitney's views, it is better to be an ignorant, as the difference between stupid and ignorant is that the ignorant could learn), Grace is obviously, yet not unexpectedly, above her station as she has the bright mind and the sharp eye to notice things and bring to the fore issues of gender, class and identity as they come out while attempting the reconstruction of her memory jigsaw puzzle. To her, all those women gazing at and observing her

> are like swans, drifting along on unseen feet; or else like the jellyfish in the waters of the rocky harbour near our house, when I was little, before I made the long sad journey across the ocean. They were bell-shaped and ruffled, gracefully waving and lovely under the sea; but if they washed up on the

> beach and dried out in the sun there was nothing left of them. And that is what the ladies are like: mostly water. (24)

Displaced, having been "in various places" (110) in Canada, Grace seems to have lost her Irish linguistic identity as she "retains barely a trace of the Northern Irish accent" (154), but her memory does manage to preserve some traces of her former geographic Irish identity that she keeps in her re-presentation of "the waters of the rocky harbour near" her house. (24)

Landscaping her own Canada

Grace's first perception of the Canadian landscape lies more on the side of frightening, "all rocks and trees" (142) which "looked dark and forbidding, and not fit for human habitation at all; and there were clouds of birds that screamed like lost souls, and I hoped that we would not be compelled to live in such a place" (142).

By constantly overlapping the Irish landscape over the Canadian one, Grace attempts to fill in the empty spaces of her memory.

> What I remember is a small rocky harbour by the sea, the land green and grey in colour, with not much in the way of trees; and for that reason, I was quite frightened when I first saw large trees of the kind they have here, as I did not see how any tree could be that tall. I don't recall the place very well, as I was a child when I left it; only in scraps, like *a plate that's been broken*. There are always some pieces that would seem to belong to another plate altogether; and then there are the empty spaces, where you cannot fit anything in. (118-9)

Grace's portrayals of the Canadian landscape, projected through her eyes as makers of images, are rounded off from the information we get from Simon, as an observer of images, and his epistolary descriptions which have the role of ficelles, since they both textualize and reproject *inside* that which is *outside*. Thus, from such *witness* letters, we learn of Canada's "splendid picnics" (28) which are taken on the "shores of bluest Lake Ontario" (28), or of "sturdy Oak(s)" (28) entwined by the "loving Ivy Vine" (28) in the summertime; or that in wintertime everything is "covered with snow" (59) and that "far north and on the lakeshore" (59) the weather can hardly be good for the lungs, "as it must be very chill and damp" (59).

For the most part, the geographical boundaries of Grace's story keep pendulling back and forth Kingston, Toronto and Richmond Hill, each location representing a stage in her life or an alternative hyperreality she creates: Kingston/ the Penitentiary, Toronto/ Grace's years with Mary

Whitney, and Richmond Hill/ Grace's years at Mr Kinnear and Nancy Montgomery, all of which do help recreate a vivid and colourful picture of nineteenth-century Canada.

> I did worry about being out in the country, rather than in town, as I was now used to Toronto life - there was so much to see while walking out on errands, and sometimes there were shows and fairs, although you had to watch for thieves there; and outdoor preachers, and always a boy or a woman singing on the street for pennies. I'd seen a man eat fire, and another that could throw his voice, and a pig that could count, and a dancing bear with a muzzle on, only it was more like lurching, and the ragamuffins poked it with sticks. Also, it would be muddier in the country, without the fine raised sidewalks; and no gas lighting at night, nor grand shops, and so many church spires, and smart carriages, and new brick banks, with pillars. But I reflected that if I did not like it in the country I could always come back. (233-234)

Kingston

A "watery place" (84) in the spring, Simon's Kingston is "not a large place" (87), and its "streets are muddy and cluttered with horse dung" (87). It is "not a very prepossessing town" since, having "burned to the ground some two decades ago" (60) it "has been rebuilt with charmless dispatch" (60) and, in the hope that it will "make them less prone to conflagrations" (60), its "new buildings are of stone or brick" (60).

There is one centre around which both Simon and Grace keep revolving, and that is the Penitentiary: to Simon, the Penitentiary embodies the palpable reality he perceives as a treasure hunt intended to reveal secrets such as those of the "Greek temple"(60) or the "pagan god" (60) the inhabitants of the town worship, but to Grace the Penitentiary embodies the unpalpable, unseen mindscape, a space of her own, which she subconsciously but artificially recreates as an alternative to her dwelling space in the present: "I sit down on the straw mattress. It makes a sound like shushing. Like water on the shore. I shift from side to side, to listen to it. I could close my eyes and think I'm by the sea, on a dry day without much wind" (36). Grace's reality does not exist but it is hidden through a re-presentation that feigns a reality, her entire world is a simulacrum, a sign which has no semblance of reality whatsoever but offers her an escape from the ongoing reality of her current situation that has been replaced by false images, a mindscape, wherein it becomes impossible to distinguish between the real and the unreal.

And yet, Kingston is not a mindscape for Grace alone, as it gradually becomes one for Simon as he sees himself trapped in a reputation-staining

affair with his landlady which will further attract a negative portrayal of the city, metonymically represented by the means of the "dank miasmas" (151) which will "grow too hot" (151), and "the summer diseases" (151) in keeping with the psychologically uncomfortable situation he let himself dragged in.

Toronto

Accordingly, the Canadian landscape which is thus portrayed reveals itself as a metonymy of Grace's hyperreal mindscapes. Grace is doubly displaced. Geographically, she is an Irish immigrant, and the very few reminiscences she has of the Irish landscape overlap situations in the present and, until she reaches Toronto, she seems to be trapped in some sort of Limbo, a place of in-betweenness with no clearly assigned borders. Mentally, Grace seems to be manifesting a form of multiple personality disorder: apparently split in three and a vessel for the spirit of her dead mother (connected with by her shawl which she used to wrap her bundle of winter clothes), her dead friend Mary Whitney (whom she exchanges garments with) and her former and dead employer, Nancy Montgomery (whose piece of cloth she keeps from her dress).

> But three of the triangles in my Tree will be different. One will be white, from the petticoat I still have that was Mary Whitney's; one will be faded yellowish, from the prison nightdress I begged as a keepsake when I left there. And the third will be a pale cotton, a pink and white floral, cut from the dress of Nancy's that she had on the first day I was at Mr. Kinnear's, and that I wore on the ferry to Lewiston, when I was running away. I will embroider around each one of them with red feather-stitching, to blend them in as a part of the pattern. And so we will all be together. (534)

Grace simultaneously exists in hyperreal mindscapes, mimicking, replicating and remoulding her virtual selves constantly challenging readers who are left adrift in a textual world where the boundaries between reality and representation become blurred, making it difficult to distinguish between *reality*, and *her own simulation* of *reality* as *fantasy* seems more *real* than *reality* as the *image* has more *poise* than the *original*.

Of Memories, overlapping edges of time and peonies

There is one powerful symbol which is recurrent throughout the novel: peonies.

> Out of the gravel there are peonies growing. They come up through the loose grey pebbles, their buds testing the air like snails' eyes, then swelling

> and opening, huge dark-red flowers all shining and glossy like satin. Then they burst and fall to the ground. In the one instant before they come apart, they are like the peonies in the front garden at Mr. Kinnear's, that first day, only those were white. (5)

This is one of the opening scenes in the novel and it becomes difficult, if not impossible to overlook it: by their association with the snail (the tentative and cautious subconscious part hiding away Grace's *lost memories*), peonies become some hyperreal representation of Grace's subconscious world, a mindscape which is artificially recreated and sterile, just like those peonies which "had a dry feel" (364-365) and Grace knew they were "made of cloth" (364-365).

Peonies seem to perform the function of an opiate/lotus-like flower that has the ability to trigger off a long chain of conceived remembrances, of hyperrealities where she finds solace: long-stemmed roses and white peonies are the flowers that Grace puts in Mary Whitney's coffin; white peonies and pink roses are the flowers planted in front of Mr Kinnear's verandah which Grace sees when she first reaches Richmond; shining and red are the peonies she dreams about in prison, and these peonies "are like satin, which are like splashes of paint" (344) and their soil is "emptiness", "empty space and silence" (344).

Undoubtedly, this silence, this empty space is that hole in signification which language can only capture by re-constructing through imagination what otherwise cannot be perceived and spoken of (and for) through direct observation and reporting. This silence both empties and creates Grace's hyperreality as it stimulates the fabrication of appearance and reality, the unending fusion and confusion of identities until all barriers are lifted and Holy Trinities effected. Peonies are, in this respect, Grace's hyperreality seen not as an object and medium of the traumatic imagination but rather as an obscure illusion, since it is memory that keeps eluding itself.

When memory is fallible, storytelling comes into play, since stories are capable of exerting their manipulative and hypnotic force even after a long time: this is because memories are formed and given consistency only through the working of imagination. Thus, although Grace's mindscapes are determined by reality-testing, the frame of her hyperreality's is structured by the remnants of the hallucinatory fantasy: the ultimate guarantee of her sense of reality turns on how what her experiences of reality conform to the fantasy frame.

> 'Lying', says MacKenzie. 'A severe term, surely. Has she been lying to you, you ask? Let me put it this way – did Scheherazade lie? Not in her own eyes; indeed, the stories she told ought never to be subjected to the harsh categories of Truth and Falsehood. They belong in another realm altogether. Perhaps Grace Marks has merely been telling you what she needs to tell, in order to accomplish the desired end.'
> 'Which is?' asks Simon.
> 'To keep the Sultan amused,' says MacKenzie. 'To keep the blow from falling. To forestall your departure, and make you stay in the room with her as long as possible.' (4380)

Concluding Remarks

In *Alias Grace*, Canadian landscapes are reimagined by means of mindscapes, and Grace's lost memories are not intended to be recovered as if somebody had lost them, nor are they meant to represent reality but only to signify it. Grace's mindscapes are particularly important when their object is the unrepresentable, i.e. a reality of extreme events which, by their traumatic nature, resist representation. In this case, Grace's mindscapes do not reveal themselves as imitations of reality (mimesis), but rather as reconstructions through imagination, or as re-presentation – with images barren of the power of fancy incapable of informing our consciousness, let alone speaking for it, as we are who we are only by producing images of ourselves and our world via imagination.

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The Essence and Purpose of Intertext in Hagiographic Works Translated by Euthymius the Athonite

Irakli ORZHONIA*

Abstract

The scope of the present article is hagiographic texts translated from Greek by Euthymius the Athonite, and the aim of the research is to find out the essence and purpose of their intertext.

The study of the material revealed that the authors of the hagiographic works, describing the life-martyrdom of a particular saint, are based on three types of sources: the Scripture, historical sources and patristic sources. While citing the Bible, they use three forms: analogy with the Scripture, paraphrasing the Scripture, quoting from the Scripture. As a rule, the authors by no means offer a specific reference to which book of the Bible they used because the texts about saints were written for the community within the church, and implied that the readers would understand all the analogies, paraphrases or quotations.

Intertexts, connected with the most authoritative book – the Holy Scriptures, obviously, did not have only an artistic purpose. Their role should also be appreciated in the cultural-religious context: the writers of the lives of the saints tried in this artistic way to show the continuity of the divine works conveyed in the Scripture and their close connection with modernity, the spiritual unity of the heroes of the hagiographic writings with the biblical saints, whose ultimate goal was to strengthen the Christian faith and address the broad masses.

Using historical sources, the authors provide additional material to the reader, while referring to the patristic monuments; they offer a deep, thorough and theological discussion of the events or facts conveyed in the work enriched with appropriate terms.

Keywords: *hagiographic works, Euthymius the Athonite, intertexts, Scripture, patristic sources*

Introduction

Christian theology, as an ecclesiastical science, combines many written genres, such as bibliology, exegetics, dogmatics, polemics, hagiography, asceticism, mysticism, homiletics, Canon Law, liturgy, Apocrypha, history of the Church, ecclesiastical poetry. Each of them is a field of important value, being closely related to the others. Any issue, studied in any of these disciplines, requires a complex approach and consideration of all the data provided by different ecclesiastical genres.

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The field of research proposed in this article is hagiography, and its objective is to identify the essence and purpose of the intertext in the works belonging to this genre. Hagiography, as a branch of ecclesiastical literature, originated in the Roman Empire, where many martyrs emerged because of the persecution of the Christian Church, which took place during the first three centuries, and, naturally, there arose the need to describe their merit and pass them on to future generations.

The process of creating hagiographical texts was not limited to the first three centuries and, despite the declaration of Christianity as the state religion in the Roman Empire, it continued even after the cessation of persecution and the decline in the number of martyrs. In the epoch of peaceful circumstances around religious life, the objective of the authors of the lives of Christian figures was to tell the readers about spiritual (rather than physical) martyrdom endured daily by people of remarkable virtues.

Greek hagiographical texts are divided into two parts according to their time of origin and characteristics of contents: pre-Metaphrastic and Metaphrastic editions. Texts created from the beginning of hagiographical literature up to the 10th century were usually written in simple language without extension, and precisely those texts were called "pre-Metaphrastic editions". In the 10th century, Symeon Metaphrastes († 1000 AD), by refining and extending the hagiographical works of the pre-Metaphrastic genre, created renewed editions of "Lives" which were called "Metaphrastes" (Cross and Livingstone 2005).

This article examines three hagiographical texts of the pre-Metaphrastic edition, translated from Greek by Euthymius the Athonite. Very recently, these texts were academically published in Georgia (Gigashvili 2021). The intertext, as one of the important elements of the artistic structure of the writings, has its specific purpose. It manifests itself differently in works of different genres, which is also a natural phenomenon. Distinctly, the nature and purpose of the intertext of the hagiographical genre cannot be identical to the essence and purpose of the intertexts in the works of secular literature. The objective of the analysis presented here is to find out what kind of texts the authors chose, where from and for what purpose they selected them to be incorporated in their works.

Discussion

The research has established that the authors of hagiographical writings rely on three types of sources: 1. the Holy Scripture; 2. historical sources; 3. patristic sources, when describing the life and martyrdom of a particular saint.

1. Verification from the Holy Scripture

The investigation proved that, in the hagiographical works, the authors employ three forms of biblical testimony: a) analogy with the Holy Scripture; b) paraphrase from the Holy Scripture; c) quotation from the Holy Scripture.

a) Comparative analogy to the Holy Scripture

The following excerpt is the opening paragraph of "The Martyrdom of Eustathius Placida" (1st-2nd centuries):

> The present legal teaching is for people to distinguish goodness and perform good deeds. It teaches them to do the same things that they wish for themselves from others; It also trains them to thank the merciful God in a way they expect from whom they had done good to (Gigashvili 2021: 25).

Several notable analogies can be found in the fragment above. In particular, according to the hagiographer, there is "natural teaching", which allows people to distinguish between good and evil. These words are based on the Apostle Paul's doctrine of "natural law". The following appropriate excerpt confirms the above statement:

> For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, **do by nature things required by the law**, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness (Aland 2001: 523).

Thus, according to the apostle, natural law, harmonized with the voice of conscience, is a spiritual force of such power that enables a person to attain the knowledge of the Truth if he has an understanding attitude towards it. The same is indicated by Eustathius' biographer, when he attributes the concept of "natural teaching" to the ability to distinguish between good and evil, and identifies it as the reason for Placida's conversion.

Furthermore, according to the author, by following the above-mentioned "natural teaching" and conscience, a person can cognize the Truth, the most significant reality: "One should treat others, as he would like to be treated by others." These words were pronounced by the author in analogy with the teaching of Jesus Christ, which He gave in His Sermon on the Mount, the doctrine known as the "Golden Rule" of the Gospel:

"Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them" (Aland 2001: 22).

The same "Testimony of Eustathius" describes how Jesus Christ appeared to the above-mentioned figure between the horns of a deer, and Placidia, seeing this miracle, became His believer. His biographer responds to the above-mentioned in the following way:

> But the compassionate God, Who in various ways affects a man's Salvation and by means which He alone knows sets him upon the true path, ensnared the hunter. He manifested Himself, not through the agency of another as He did to Cornelius through Peter, but directly, as He did to Paul (Gigashvili 2021: 27).

The author sees an example of Eustathius' miraculous conversion to Christianity in the Holy Scripture and refers to two events in the Bible: 1. The baptism of Cornelius by the Apostle Peter (see Aland 2001: 443-448); 2. The conversion of the Apostle Paul (see Aland 2001: 439-440). The purpose of the comparative analogy given above is to help the reader realize that the story of Placida does not follow the way of the conversion of a person to the true faith by another person, as the Apostle Peter did with Cornelius and his family. Rather, there follows the revelation of God granted to the Apostle Paul while the latter was on his way to Damascus, seeking to arrest Christians when Jesus Christ Himself appeared to Paul, the Chief Apostle, without anybody's intercession. According to the author, a similar event occurs in the case of Placida when, while chasing a deer, he sees Jesus Christ among its horns and, having seen this miracle, converts to Christianity.

In the same work, the author of "The Martyrdom of Eustathius" describes the following:

> God showed him a miracle, which was nothing different from His almighty Power, as nothing can transcend His Might; The Lord worked a wonder as He had done when He opened the donkey's mouth and the animal spoke to Balaam. He showed him the image of the Holy Cross, more glorious than the brightness of the sun, which appeared over the horns of the deer, and between its horns, He revealed His Holy Face to him, which He assumed for the sake of our Salvation. He made the deer speak with a human tongue through which He spoke to him, saying: "Placida, why are you persecuting Me? (Gigashvili 2021:28).

Balaam, mentioned by the author, is one of the Biblical characters who lived in Mesopotamia during the Exodus. According to the Holy Scripture, the

magus Balaam, who went to curse the chosen nation of the Old Testament against the will of God, was reproved by his own donkey who spoke to him (cf. Rahlfs 2006: 255-256). The present account draws a parallel between the above biblical story and the event that befell Eustathius, for, according to the biographer, as in the case of Balaam, God (Jesus Christ) addresses Eustathius through a deer, which speaks to him (cf. "and called him, and spoke unto him through the deer"). Based on the last example, we can freely state that in some cases analogy may be only partial and exclude full similarity since, in the case of the comparison of the above biblical or hagiographical events, the analogy is related to the speechless creatures (the donkey and the deer) and in no way to the persons (Balaam or Eustathius). According to the Holy Scripture, Balaam the Magus' action is conditioned by covetousness and deserves a negative evaluation, while Placida, according to his biographer, is one of the most distinguished figures who suppressed in himself all worldly passions and earned the crown of righteousness. In this case, we draw attention to one more situation and cite an excerpt from "the Martyrdom of Anthimus of Nicomedia" (3rd-4th centuries): "He embraced with his soul and mind the Mother of virtues - the love of God" (Gigashvili 2021: 72).

The author's reference to love as the most sublime virtue is grounded on the Holy Scripture. For example, in the Epistle of the Apostle Paul we read: "And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; ***but the greatest of these is love***" (Aland 2001: 598). John the Theologian, on the other hand, offers a more transcendant definition of the meaning of the term "love" and attributes it to God as His personal Name "God is love" (Aland 2001: 817).

Thus, the author, praising Anthimus, displays the martyr's distinctive spiritual dignity to the reader. In attaining his objective, he is guided by the analogy of biblical teaching and, grounding his standpoint on the Holy Scripture, presents the High Priest of Nicomedia as the person who aspires to attain the supreme virtue - love.

b) Paraphrase from the Holy Scripture

The same work, "The Martyrdom of Anthimus" (3rd-4th centuries), also has the following entry:

> He adorned this city and church the most with all his possessions and wealth, and converted to Christianity not only the inhabitants of this city but the whole region (Gigashvili 2021: 72).

The above-given appraisal of the figure who lived and worked in Nicomedia should be divided into two parts. The first one, which describes the activities carried out by Anthimus, how he adorned the city of Nicomedia and the church situated in it, belongs to the author himself. As for the following one, since the author's objective was to show not only Anthimus' contribution to the improvements in his home town (Nicomedia), but also his deeds done throughout the entire region, the paraphrase of the relevant psalm was considered to be the best solution, and the mentioned fact was expressed as: "The rumour of his work spread all the earth and his miracles – to the end of the world". The original source of the cited quotation is Psalm 18. The appropriate place in the psalm reads: "Their rumor spread all the earth, and their words - to the end of the world" (Rahlfs 2006: 17).

A comparative analysis of the texts established that, while paraphrasing the biblical sentence, the author made certain alterations. In particular, the psalm has the plural pronoun "Their" twice (cf. "Their rumor", "their words"), which in both cases the author replaced with the singular "His". In addition, one word ("work") was added to the first part of the quotation from the psalm, thus giving it the following meaning: "The rumor of his work" (cf. "The rumour of ***his work*** spread all the earth"). As for the concluding part of the sentence, the author uses paraphrase here as well and, instead of the word "words" (cf. "their words") in the psalm, he suggests the term "Miracles" (cf. and his ***miracles*** – "to the end of the world"). It is obvious that as a result of such an intervention, the original source undergoes some changes, but the essence conveyed in it is fully preserved.

c) Quotation from the Holy Scripture

In another section of the writing, while describing the life of the high priest from Nicomedia, the author tells the reader about the ordination of Anthimus as a clergyman:

> Then the archbishop of the Church, placed him under the yoke of church ministry, and ordained him as archdeacon, and after a short time, elivated him to the rank of a priest, as it is written, they glorified the Lord on the thrones of the elders (Gigashvili 2021:73).

The fact is that the author himself uses the word "written" to indicate that the concluding part of the sentence is quoted from some source, but he does not specify its origin. The above phrase can be clearly identified as a

quotation from a psalm, the appropriate place of which reads: "Praise him in the assembly of the elders" (Rahlfs 2006: 120).

Special explanation should be provided for the purpose of citing the biblical verse proper (rather than any other). We will first draw the readers' attention to the fact that the author suggests it as a continuation of the information about Anthimus' ordination as a priest. The fact is that the Greek term πρεσβυτερος is used in it, which, in everyday speech means "old man", "elder", "elderly man"; however, in ecclesiastical texts, the same term, in the appropriate context, is translated as "priest" (Lampe 1961: 1130).

Thus, while narrating the story of Anthimus' ordination as a priest, the author gives an excerpt from the psalm in which the relevant term and the essence of the event are best combined: As a Priest (Greek: πρεσβυτερων), i.e. young Anthimus, who was elevated to the rank of a priest and was seen by many as an experienced person of deep spirituality, as elderly men are, will be glorifying God with his own way of life.

2. Historical sources

The author of "The Martyrdom of Anthimus of Nicomedia" describes in his work the circumstances in the early fourth century in Nicomedia and its surrounding areas, when the Christians living in that territory had to undergo the most difficult trial – Emperor Maximilian unleashed a severe persecution of these communities. According to the author, that persecution claimed the lives of thousands of believers who were burned alive. Here is the appropriate place:

> The power of his teachings is attested to by the excellent and glorious, marvelous man Inde, the servant of the king's palace. As a result of the teachings of the great Anthimus, he abandoned the pleasures of the king and the royal court, and placed the crown of torture on the head together with the maid of honour Domna, who had been baptized by the previous high priest Cyril. At the time of Anthimus, 20 000 martyrs, including Mardonius, Migdonius, Peter, Dorotheus and Zeno, were burned brave men who voluntarily shed their blood for the love of Christ (Gigashvili 2021: 74).

The fact is that Eusebius of Caesarea, who lived in the 3rd-4th centuries and witnessed the persecution preserved in the Martyrdom of Anthimus, later described it in detail in the Eighth Book of "Ecclesiastical History" (see Schaff and Wace 1904: 323-341). Moreover, the same Eusebius gives information about the martyrdom of Anthimus as well. It is noteworthy that the five figures mentioned only by name in the Martyrdom of the high priest

of Nicomedia – Mardonius, Migdonius, Peter, Dorotheus and Zeno – are also mentioned in writing of Eusebius; however, the latter also draws special attention to their lives and activities.

3. Patristic sources

An in-depth analysis of hagiographical works reveals that, in discussing theological issues, the authors sometimes used teachings preserved in ecclesiastical texts. This time we would like to focus on one of them: the life of Eustathius Placida (re-examining this passage with a different emphasis): He showed him the image of the Holy Cross, more glorious than the brightness of the sun, which appeared over the horns of the deer, and between the horns, He revealed His Holy Face to him, which He took for the sake ***of our salvation*** (Gigashvili 2021:28).

The author of Eustathius' Martyrdom in the aforementioned section relies on one of the most important teachings of Christian theology – Soteriology: God beheld by Placida between the horns of the deer is Jesus Christ, who took human form and the eternal God revealed Himself to the Universe as a Man to save the human race.

Special attention should be paid to the author's statement, according to which ***"for our salvation"*** God joined in His own hypostasis the human form. It is to be especially emphasized that the highlighted words are the teaching conveying the most existential Christological dogma preserved in the Christian "Creed", and, undoubtedly, it is precisely on this "Creed" that the author relies while giving his explanation of the theological issue stated above. The relevant section of the "Creed" is:

> And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten, begotten of the Father before all ages. Light of light; true God of true God; begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father, by Whom all things were made; Who for us men and ***for our salvation*** came down from Heaven· (Schaff 1896: 58-59).

Thus, the terminological and syntactic coincidence between the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and the corresponding sections of Eustathius' Martyrdom shows that the original source used by the author of Placida's Life is the monument of dogmatic content known as the "Creed".

The example above is another proof that the authors of the Greek pre-Metaphrastic editions translated by Euthymius the Athonite, in addition to conveying the basic history related to a particular saint, were

guided by patristic sources and by the relevant terms preserved in them, while analyzing theological issues.

Our objective in the following part of this discussion is to indicate the above-mentioned theory, this time with reference to the final part of the Martyrdom of Eustathius Placida: "This is the work of these saints, this is the end of their glorious deeds. All who will be worthy of their remembrance, and will regard them as helpers, will find the goodness which is by the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, *which is the glory and steadfastness with the Father and the Holy Spirit to the ages of ages. Amen."*

A similar epilogue is found in Theodor of Perga's Martyrdom: "Theodore, his mother Philippa, and two horsemen were executed on the 20th of August, during the reign of Antoninus, and our Ruler is Christ God, *who is our glory and endurance with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Amen to the ages of ages!"*

A conclusion along the same lines is offered by the biographer of Anthimus of Nicomedia:

> The Christians came at dusk, took the honored corpse, and buried it in a place of honour as a fragrant ointment, a treasure of healing, and the light of believers, with the grace and humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ, the true God and Father, glory be to the Father and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, to the ages of ages, Amen (Gigashvili 2021: 83).

The texts we have referred to show that all three sources offer sentences containing virtually identical content and terms. Likewise, in the discussion offered above, in the given case, the author of all three texts is guided by ecclesiastical sources. In particular, liturgical books are essentially replete with quotations of the same form.

As the above sources testify, while working on the endings of their writings, the authors of the hagiographical works of the pre-Metaphrastic edition, translated by Euthymius the Athonite, were obviously guided by ecclesiastical written sources because their objective was to conclude the description of the lives of figures devoted to their faith with the glorification of the One God of Three Persons, which they believed in.

Conclusions

Based on the analysis of the three hagiographical works of the pre-Metaphrastic edition, translated by Euthymius the Athonite, the following conclusions could be drawn:

1. The authors use three forms of biblical testimony: **a)** a comparative analogy with the Holy Scripture; **b)** paraphrases from the Holy Scripture; **c)** quotations from the Holy Scripture. As a rule, they do not specify in any of the cases which book of the Bible they referred to for their quotations because the texts of lives and martyrdom were written for the community within the Church, and it was implied that the readers would understand what the original source of all analogies, paraphrases, or quotations was. In addition, the observation shows that the authors of the pre-Metaphrastic texts studied, in contrast to the other two cases mentioned above, while citing from the Holy Scriptures, prepare the readers in advance by starting the quotations with "For it is written…", thus indicating in particular that, in such cases, the author's narrative continues with a sentence attested by another source.

2. On the basis of a comparative study of the three pre-Metaphrastic editions and ancient historical sources, we can state that the authors of the indicated hagiographical works are in some cases also guided by sources containing historical content, and enrich their creations with the relevant information contained in them.

3. While discussing theological issues proper, the author of all three hagiographical works is guided by patristic texts and cites the content of the teachings, including relevant terms from those texts without any alterations.

As for the objectives of the intertexts discussed above, it is evident that, since hagiography is a genre of ecclesiastical literature, while conveying the life of a saint, the authors referred to a biblical analogy, a quotation or a paraphrase relevant to the context of their story. They did so in order to testify to the uniqueness of the events narrated in the text with the examples of the most authoritative book for Christians – the Holy Scripture. However, the reference to the historical sources was conditioned by the rich factual material preserved in them, which allowed the writer to give the information he was interested in when necessary. Alongside it, the author's purpose while referring to patristic monuments is to offer the reader a deep and thorough theological discussion, enriched with relevant terminology.

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"I'm Too Broken to Belong:" Subverting the Victorian Nuclear Family through the Concept of Family of Choice in *The Irregulars* (2021)

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Abstract

Family occupies a central position in (neo-)Victorian fiction. Yet, the ideal nuclear family myth is often contested, since this institution tends to be portrayed as dysfunctional, broken and oppressive. By contrast, alternative reconfigurations of the heteronormative household in neo-Victorianism encourage an empathic and tolerant engagement to both Victorian and contemporary eccentric family models. The Netflix original series The Irregulars *(2021) follows this pattern by placing a gang of Othered outcasts rejected by their families at the centre of the narrative. In this article, I analyse how the series subverts the traditional conceptualization of the Victorian family and proposes, instead, an alternative concept of community: the neo-Victorian family of choice.*

Keywords: *Neo-Victorianism; dysfunctional families; family of choice; subverting gender conventions; Otherness*

The adventures of Sherlock Holmes are some of the most revisited texts from the Victorian era. Over the last decade, there has been a renewed interest in adapting Doyle's novels, arguably triggered by the commercial success of the Guy Ritchie film franchise – *Sherlock Holmes* (2009) and *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* (2010) – and its contemporary reimagining in the BBC TV series *Sherlock* (2009-2017). Other commercially successful adaptations include the CBS TV series *Elementary* (2012-2019), the Japanese film *Miss Sherlock* (2018) or the Netflix original *Enola Holmes* (2020).

The Irregulars (2021), a neo-Victorian mystery series created by Tom Bidwell for Netflix, is the latest of these 'Holmesian' adaptations. It follows the Baker Street Irregulars: a group of homeless teenagers that work for Dr Watson, solving crimes and saving Victorian London from supernatural creatures. These eccentric characters need to close 'a rip' between the world of the living and that of the dead, which threatens to bring about an apocalypse. *The Irregulars* premiered on 26 March 2021 on Netflix, but was cancelled in May 2021, despite landing on the platform's top 10 list. It retells the adventures of Sherlock Holmes for a young audience, foregrounding

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traditional aspects of teen dramas – e.g., the anguish of a first love, family dysfunctionalities and the importance of belonging to a community – or family of choice – where one can be accepted and loved. *The Irregulars* follows the pattern of other recent neo-Victorian screen texts, most notably *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016) – which also features a group of dysfunctional detectives that confront supernatural forces to save London from an apocalypse – or the HBO series *The Nevers* – which follows a group of women, known as 'the Touched,' who are ostracized for having supernatural abilities.

This article first offers a brief introduction to the neo-Victorian serial television and the pivotal role that family plays in it. Second, it focuses on the concept of 'family of choice' as the central category of analysis and how it can help subvert the idealized notion of the nuclear family in *The Irregulars*. Attention is also paid to the manner in which its protagonists are Othered on account of their (dis)abilities and transgressions of Victorian gender conventions. All in all, the article shows that the portrayal of families of choice in neo-Victorianism on screen advocates for alternative models of family life and celebrates diversity in both Victorian and contemporary societies.

The Neo-Victorian serial television and the family of choice

The neo-Victorian TV serial greatly differs from "the traditional, fidelity-driven 'classic' adaptations" that were produced in the 1990s, since "it taps into current audience desire for a more playful, less reverential adaptive treatment" of Victorian literature (Griggs 2018: 13). Neo-Victorian TV series like *The Irregulars* subvert the audience's expectations, from their innovative adaptive approach of nineteenth-century canonical texts to their aesthetic style. Thus, they remain "in dialogue with," but are not defined by their antecedents (Griggs 2018: 14).

Moreover, historical TV series are usually judged by their creative capacity to meet the contemporary audience's expectations of the period. Claire Meldrum contends that neo-Victorian detective fiction like *The Irregulars* usually combines historical facts with fantasy, highlighting "both the continuities and discontinuities between the Victorian era and our own, suggestive of continuing social anxieties" (2015: 203). Yet, these screen representations do not always have self-reflexive or critical intentions. Sometimes, they are wish-fulfilment fantasies to retroactively right past wrongs. Marie-Luise Kohlke also highlights the "presentist" component of neo-Victorianism, which involves forcing deliberate changes in the past that might help fulfil the political agendas of contemporary creators (2018: 2).

A deliberate presentist aspect in *The Irregulars* is the choice of a colour-blind cast, as the actors were selected irrespective of their race. This, according to Mel Valentin, "adds another element of the fantastical and counter-factual to the series" (2021: 7). Choosing a colour-blind cast in historical screen texts is becoming increasingly popular, as Kim Newman claims, *The Irregulars* shares with historical TV series like *Bridgerton* "a vision of the past with colour-blind casting. Not only are ragamuffins and slum-dwellers multiracial, so are the nobility and indeed it is not uncommon for Black, White, and Asian characters to be related to each other without explanation" (2002: 37).

Thus, the show adopts an inclusive approach to race similar, which speaks "to the multicultural reality of the country" (Wolf 2021: 3). Even though the colour-blind cast in *The Irregulars* seemingly promotes inclusivity and diversity, it might actually have the opposite effect. Casting actors from different racial backgrounds without taking their ethnicity into consideration might result in "an overarching narrative that erases the specificities of cultural memory and inculcates a homogenization of heritage" (Llewellyn and Heilmann 2010: 26). These narratives might be perceived as reductionist and imposing a (neo-) imperialist colonization of ethnic communities.

On a different note, family occupies a central position in neo-Victorianism, although it is usually depicted as both dysfunctional and fragmented. Kohlke and Gutleben argue that the reconfiguration of the neo-Victorian family enables us to reflect on contemporary anxieties related to shifting family values and their potential collapse. Alternative portrayals of the nuclear family in neo-Victorianism encourage a more empathetic reading of unconventional family models in both present and past periods (Kohlke and Gutleben 2021: 1).

The family of choice is here understood following Kath Weston's definition as an alternative to traditional heteronormative models of family life, which includes friends, "lovers, coparents, adopted children, children from previous heterosexual relationships, and offspring conceived through alternative insemination" (1997: 3). The family of choice is considered a support community and replacement parenthood for non-normative characters in neo-Victorian screen texts, as in *Penny Dreadful* or *The Nevers*. In Western societies, the nuclear family holds a privileged position and supplies a "cultural framework for configuring kinship that people can draw upon to interpret the world around them" (Weston 1997: 6-7). Thus, the family of choice would be an alternative to this institution, which can encompass those individuals who have lost their biological relatives or who

do not meet the requirements to form a nuclear family. *The Irregulars* seems to follow this trend, as its main characters – a group of orphan teenagers – favour the family of choice – a community that accepts their Othering traits.

Dismantling the nuclear family through the family of choice in *The Irregulars*

The Irregulars follows a group of teenage outcasts led by the female protagonists, Beatrice (Bea) and her sister, Jessie, who live in a basement in London's underbelly with their close friends: Billy and Spike. Thanks to Jessie's supernatural abilities, they help the iconic detective duo, Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson, solve paranormal crimes in Victorian London. Eventually, they discover that these crimes are all connected to a rip that Alice – Bea and Jessie's mother – has opened in the barrier between the world of the living and the dead. If they do not close it, the barrier will collapse and both worlds will become one. After a fortuitous event, disabled Prince Leopold of England (Leo) joins this unlikely gang of detectives.

Even though these characters come from very different backgrounds, they have one thing in common: their dysfunctional households. Some of them hail from fragmented families that have abandoned them, as Bea and Jessie, whose parents – Sherlock Holmes and Alice – prioritized the study of the supernatural over their children's safety. As mentioned above, *The Irregulars* depicts a colour-blind society where racial marginalization does not exist, although there are other forms of discrimination directed at the main characters. The four original friends have always been discriminated because they are orphaned and poor. Prince Leopold, on the contrary, comes from the most powerful family in England, but has been hidden from the public eye due to his disability: haemophilia. Although his family claims that they keep him confined in the palace for his own protection, he feels extremely alone and neglected, as he has never had any true friends. Likewise, Jessie is also Othered because of her supernatural abilities. Like her mother, she is a psychic that can access other people's minds and is feared because of it. Since all these characters have been marginalized by both society and their own families, they long for a family of choice where they can feel accepted.

In the nineteenth-century Anglo-American context, "the cult of domesticity" was adopted by middle-class families (Dulberger 1996: 23). In order for this ideal to be fulfilled, families needed to be sheltered in a "world of quiet, seclusion, and privacy:" the family house, which came to be regarded as a refuge from the dangers of the outside world (Dulberger 1996: 24-25). However, poor parents could not afford such privileges, and their only alternatives were the orphanage or – as in the case of *The Irregulars* – the workhouse.

The workhouse was a Victorian institution whose purpose was to provide shelter and work for poor people that did not have the means to support themselves. According to Simon Fowler, workhouses were originally designed for "able-bodied paupers, that is men and women between the ages of 16 and 60, who were judged fit enough to work for their living and therefore, should not require any assistance" (2014: 2). Nonetheless, from the mid-1840s onwards – after the economic depression – this institution became a "shelter" for "the elderly, the sick, orphans and those who were incapable of earning a living" (Fowler 2014: 2).

Workhouses were notorious for their "terrible conditions, forced child labour, long hours, malnutrition, beatings and neglect" (Brain 2021: 2). These conditions are graphically described by Bea in *The Irregulars*: "when we were in the workhouse being beaten and punched and spat on! […] when we were starving to death wondering whether to sell ourselves to stay alive" (Bidwell 2021: Episode 5, 00:44:06-00:44:21). Victorian writers denounced the harsh circumstances of workhouses in their works, most notably Charles Dickens in *Oliver Twist; or, the Parish Boy's Progress* (1837-1839), where he criticized the cruel reality of an orphan child living in one.

On a different note, gender conventions were solidly established in the Victorian era and defined what behavioural traits men and women had to display. This was due to a "separate spheres ideology," adopted during the 1830s and 1840s in England, which redefined gender identities, as it "shifted the control over work to men and home to women" (Lewis 2011: 33). The separate spheres philosophy was adopted in order to establish a hierarchical system that favoured white, middle-class, heteronormative and patriarchal models of family life (Chambers 2021: 33). Indeed, Chambers defines the dysfunctional family as the nuclear family's counterpart, "as a counterfoil, as a permanent reminder of the need to fight for the preservation of the ideal as something more than a myth, as something that once existed and that must be recovered" (2021: 66). As a result, the Victorian nuclear family has played a pivotal role in (neo-)Victorian fiction, especially as the locus of gendered traumas (Kohlke and Gutleben 2011: 1). As a result, alternative portrayals to this institution in neo-Victorianism encourage a more empathetic engagement on the part of the audience towards unconventional family models, as in the case of *The Irregulars*.

Owing to Jessie's supernatural abilities, Dr Watson hires the protagonists to investigate a string of crimes with a supernatural component – that also appear to be rooted in family traumas. These include a number of new-born babies being kidnapped by the head ornithologist of the London Zoo, whose baby died in childbirth. He believes that his child was actually

swapped with a dead one, so he is now kidnapping all the babies that were born on that day to find her. There is also a woman – known as the tooth fairy – who steals people's teeth to grow clones of them and make them kill the man that led her father to commit suicide. An orphan girl also removes the face of the men that sexually assaulted her and gave her syphilis. She then 'wears' their faces to become them and infiltrate their families, as they ruined any possibility, she had of forming a family of her own. Finally, there is the case of the collector, which is seemingly inspired by Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818): a botanist collects body parts to put together a new body for her dying husband. Thus, all these criminals are actually desperate characters who lost a dear relative or were deprived of the possibility of forming a nuclear family. Now, they are using the supernatural powers from the rip to compensate for those losses.

Moreover, these supernatural criminals transgress Victorian gender conventions that were usually transmitted through the nuclear family – another trait they share with the protagonists. Both Jessie and her mother follow the recurrent pattern of female characters that are sensitive to supernatural forces in (neo-)Victorian fiction. They are psychics, rejected and considered madwomen by society – including their own families. Initially, when Jessie starts manifesting her supernatural abilities, Bea believes that she is going insane, as their mother supposedly did, before allegedly committing suicide. Nevertheless, they are actually "ipsissimi: a true psychic. It means 'powerful one.' One who can see into the souls of men. One who can change the destiny of the world" (Bidwell 2021: Episode 3, 00:31:08-00:31:17). Jessie can get into other people's minds and access their fondest memories, but also their deepest traumas, and is feared because of it. Therefore, she follows the (neo-)Victorian trope of the female medium.

The female medium subverted traditional understandings of Victorian femininity and defied established views of class and sexuality, as well as the role that women played in both the private and public spheres (Kontou 2008: 275). Spiritualist activities were arguably contradictory practices in terms of gender roles. On the one hand, they followed Victorian conventions of proper womanhood, as séances required "passivity, weakness and mental instability" (Arias 2005: 165). On the other hand, they granted women a female power that challenged them (Kontou 2008: 276). This is the case of Jessie in *The Irregulars*, as she is the most powerful of the group and the one that holds the key to closing the rip. However, she is also seen by her friends as a fragile and helpless child that needs to be protected, as she complains: "I'm just a burden to you all, aren't I? Just someone you have to look after" (Bidwell 2021: Episode 1, 00:38:14-00:38:19).

Likewise, the male protagonists of *The Irregulars* defy Victorian precepts of manhood. Men were forced to visibly perform their 'masculinity,' and were supposed to display "a strong and active physicality" (Lewis 2011: 13). This also implied a "homosexual panic" in their gender performance. Men did not want to appear "too attached to other men" and had to "enter into heterosexual marriage to avoid any doubts about their sexuality and heterosexual identity" (Lewis 2011: 46). Finally, men were supposed to display "manhood." This was "not innate," but "the result of arduous public or private ritual and, for the Victorian bourgeois, of continued demanding self-discipline" (Sussman 1999: 13).

All the male protagonists in *The Irregulars* fail to fulfil these Victorian gender conventions, and would thus not be considered 'real men' for nineteenth-century standards. When Alice was engulfed by the rip, Sherlock was left in charge of their daughters, Bea and Jessie, but he was so devastated by Alice's loss that he could not bring himself to behave like an ideal Victorian father – i.e., a protector and a provider. Instead, he became an opium addict and abandoned the girls at the workhouse, as drugs were the only thing that could numb the pain he felt. Nonetheless, he did not feel guilty for leaving his nuclear family, but for losing his family of choice: the original Irregulars, an amateur group of detectives made up by Alice, Dr Watson and himself. As he tells Jessie, he misses those days of camaraderie: "the darkest of times have a habit of forming the closest of bonds. It's a gift. To feel so connected to others. So close. To be part of a team. Cherish it. Believe me. Doesn't last forever" (Bidwell 2021: Episode 6, 00:23:45-00:24:11).

Sherlock claims that he lost his brilliance and capacity for deduction when Alice disappeared. She had tried to convince him to focus on their family, as he was putting them in danger with his investigations, but Sherlock's thirst for fame and recognition was stronger than his love for his family. In the end, he lost her when they tried to close the rip and she was engulfed by it. He tried to pull her out, but Dr Watson held him so that he would not be absorbed as well. Thus, he is rejected by his daughters for being an absent father and for his lack of self-control as a drug addict. These traits also question his Victorian masculinity and the possibility of his being part of a nuclear family.

Likewise, Billy also defies Victorian male gender conventions. He grew up in the workhouse believing that his mother was a weaver from Manchester that died giving birth to him, and that his father perished fighting for the empire in the Crimean War. Therefore, his only parental figure was a cruel and violent man named Vic, the master of the workhouse, who used to physically abuse Billy and his friends. Like Vic himself tells him:

"I'm the closest thing you ever had to a father" (Bidwell 2021: Episode 8, 00:09:54-00:09:57). As a child, Bill felt guilty and powerless because he could not protect his friends from Vic's violence. Victorian gender conventions dictated that, as a man, he was supposed to be physically strong and protect his family – in this case, his friends. Thus, now that he is an adult, he has to prove that he is strong and able to provide for them, and he often takes part in clandestine fights in order to make money to support them.

The master's influence over Billy is ultimately seen when, in a fortuitous encounter on the street, Vic attacks him and Billy kills him in self-defence. For Vic, masculinity entails violence and physical strength. He sees Billy as weak because he is an orphan and did not have a male role model growing up: "The trouble is with boys without dads, they don't learn how to be real men. But I'm going to teach you" (Bidwell 2021: Episode 6, 00:42:17-00:42:20). Despite the fact that Billy's actions might be understood as Vic's victory in turning him into a prototypically aggressive working-class man, Vic's taunting and villainy are portrayed as so extreme that the audience is given the opportunity to enjoy his death vicariously. Moreover, Billy is presented as ethical for resisting violence for so long. This is so because, even though Billy has now removed this instance of toxic masculinity from his life, he feels guilty for killing Vic, as his bloody ghost haunts him. This seems to prove that, despite Vic' efforts to transform Billy into a 'real man,' he remains true to his principles.

On a different note, Prince Leopold resembles the disabled prince in Dinah Maria Mulock Craik's *The Little Lame Prince* (1875), as he has been kept hidden from the public eye because he is haemophilic. Therefore, "it would appear as a sign of the nation's weakness to have a prince whose visible appearance did not meet the requirements of being physically active and strong. The eventual visibility of the prince is" key in developing his masculinity (Lewis 2011: 34).

Arias compares the fragmentation of the nuclear family and its corresponding failure of national harmony with the link between disabled bodies and disabled nations in neo-Victorianism (2011: 362). Consequently, Leo's disability would not merely be an outer reflection of his fragmented and flawed family, but also of the corrupted and divided British empire. His family has kept him hidden in a golden cage, making him feel abnormal and unlovable. Yet, when he meets Bea and joins The Irregulars, he feels a sense of belonging that he has never experienced before. They treat him as an equal, since he conceals his true identity at first. When they discover who he really is, he is forced to go back to the palace, where he feels unloved once

again. Nevertheless, Spike reminds him that he is still part of the gang, precisely because he is Othered and damaged:

> Leo: My problem is that I lost the only friends I ever had. My problem is that I-I don't belong anywhere. Not here, not there, nowhere. That's because no matter where I go, I'm always me. I'm too broken to belong.
> Spike: That's why you belong to us (Bidwell 2021: Episode 7, 00:26:20-00:26:27).

Thus, Prince Leopold chooses the Irregulars as his family of choice, the place where he feels respected, loved and protected. Whereas his family see his disability as something shameful that needs to be kept concealed from the public – as it threatens both his masculinity and the nation's stability – his friends accept him as he is and celebrate his capacities.

Finally, Dr Watson is another male character in *The Irregulars* who does not fit Victorian gender conventions. Watson displays self-discipline and restraint and he could be a provider and protector for his prospective family. However, he is not married and lives with another man – Sherlock – to whom he is overtly attached. Other adaptations of Sherlock Holmes had played with the homoerotic subtext present in the relationship between Sherlock and Dr Watson. This is the case of the BBC TV series *Sherlock* and the abovementioned filmic adaptations directed by Ritchie. Here, some paratexual elements – like Robert Downey Jr.'s interviews – arguably predisposed the audience to see the films as "queer texts" (Thomas 2012: 36). This homoerotic desire is explicit in *The Irregulars*, albeit one-sided. Watson confesses to Bea that he has always loved his partner (Bidwell 2021: Episode 7, 00:03:49-00:03:55), but Sherlock was in love with Alice. Thus, Watson opened the first rip that took Alice because he was jealous of her relationship with Sherlock.

Moreover, Dr Watson was as responsible for abandoning Bea and Jessie as Sherlock, since he was the one that took them to the workhouse. He had lost the only family he had ever had, Alice and Sherlock, and did not want to take on the responsibility of providing a home for their daughters. As a consequence, Dr Watson is portrayed here as an egotistical character that only cares about his and Sherlock's wellbeing, even if that means putting other people in danger. Yet, he tries to redeem himself by the end of the series, when he saves Jessie from being engulfed by the second rip, and arguably becomes The Irregulars' father of choice.

Thus, the protagonists of *The Irregulars* are marginalized and rejected by both society and their biological families on account of their gender

transgressions. Investigating the supernatural cases connected to the new the rip has brought them together, forming a family of choice that has granted them a sense of belonging that they had never experienced before. Nonetheless, discovering that Alice, who was trapped in Purgatory, was the one who opened the new rip to return to the world of the living brings to the fore repressed questions about the nuclear family. Alice needs to be pulled back to the other side of the rip so that it can be closed, but she refuses to do so because she does not want to be away from her family anymore. Sherlock and Bea also want Alice to stay and do not care about the consequences.

Sherlock and Bea's attitudes are completely selfish and unethical, yet understandable, because the girls grew up without their mother, and Sherlock has spent the last sixteen years of his life without the love of his life. Jessie and Watson are the only ones that understand the risks that the rip entails. By accessing Bea's fondest memories, Jessie shows her that it is not worth risking that happiness and the safe of humanity for a nuclear family that abandoned them. Bea finally realizes that what tore their family apart was not losing her mother, but repressing all the pain and suffering caused by that loss. Their mother's return has granted them the chance to come to terms with her passing and accept that they have to move on.

Hence, the two sisters decide to let their mother go and embrace their family of choice. The rip absorbs Alice, but it is so powerful that is about to engulf Jessie as well. Whilst Sherlock holds onto Alice to join her on the other side, Watson tries to pull him out again. Bea begs the latter to help her save Jessie, and the doctor finally lets Sherlock go and pulls Jessie out. The rip closes and the girls accept that their father has chosen to go with Alice and abandon them once again, as Bea says: "They definitely loved each other. And I guess some can't exist if they're apart." (Bidwell 2021: Episode 8, 00:42:20-00:42:26). Even though Sherlock and Alice have left them again, the series finale ends with a hopeful note, in an emotive scene between Bea and Dr Watson, who will likely adopt the role of a surrogate father to The Irregulars. When Bea complains that "[e]verybody leaves me," Dr Watson replies, "I'm here. I'm not going anywhere" (Bidwell 2021: Episode 8, 00:52:27-00:52:38). Thus, the series favours the family of choice over the nuclear one, as it provides a loving community for Othered characters.

It is also worth considering how the series ambiguously portrays Dr Watson. He is first depicted as egotistical and possessive of Sherlock, when he opened the first rip. Moreover, he did not protect the girls when Sherlock wanted to give them up, although he appears to atone for his sins when he saves Jessie from the rip and becomes a father figure for the kids. However, there is little guarantee that Watson would have remained a surrogate father

to The Irregulars had the series not been cancelled, given the ambivalent manner in which the show has been presenting the character. This would compromise the idea of the family of choice, especially if we also consider Leo's inability to stay with the others because of a deal that saves Billy's life, but forces him back to the palace.

Conclusions

The nuclear family is usually depicted as fragmented and dysfunctional in neo-Victorian TV series. This is the case of *The Irregulars*, where it fails as the institution upholding the nation's principles of community, cooperation and life in society. Likewise, its protagonists challenge Victorian gender conventions that this institution conveyed and, as a result, they are Othered by both society and their relatives. Nevertheless, they could be said to fit neo-Victorian conventions of the unconventional, as they are almost stereotypical neo-Victorian marginalized characters: the strong female protagonist that fiercely protects her family, a tortured character that becomes a drug addict because of past trauma and a woman with supernatural abilities that is marginalized for it.

In neo-Victorian family narratives like *The Irregulars,* one sees a prioritization of the family of choice, since the protagonists have been abandoned by their biological families because of their Othering traits. In their chosen families, there are more collaborative models of life in society and a philosophy of "care for the other" (Kohlke and Gutleben 2021: 39). Furthermore, these neo-Victorian families of choice embrace diversity –e.g., Leo's disability, Jessie's supernatural abilities or Watson's homosexuality–, whereas the nuclear family is portrayed as a conservative institution that rejects those who do not follow gender conventions. Finally, the subversion of traditional family values through the neo-Victorian family of choice arguably dismantles the myth of the ideal nuclear household and promotes other family models in our society, such as childless and queer marriages, monoparental households, or alternative forms to traditional ways of parenting, including adoption or subrogation.

Nonetheless, it is also worth stressing how the plot twists in season 1 sometimes undermine the idea of a chosen family. In the series finale, the Irregulars are abandoned by Alice and Sherlock, who leave them with Watson. This latter character experiences an abrupt change in the series, since he is first portrayed as a jealous, lying and selfish man, who is later redeemed when he saves Jessie from the rip. The fact that he is forgiven in the end, despite his inexcusable betrayal of Alice and Sherlock, and his

refusal to save Bea and Jessie from the workhouse, raises some questions about the series' ethics.

Finally, if we consider the target audience of *The Irregulars* and other recent screen adaptations of Sherlock Holmes, such as the above-mentioned *Enola Holmes* or *Miss Sherlock*, we could consider them as part of a new trend that reimagines Doyle's novels as young adult fiction. These adaptations update the Victorian detective story to become more appealing to a young audience. Moreover, the focus of the series on family and the importance of belonging to a loving and accepting community aligns neo-Victorian young fiction with teen dramas, which could contribute to the increasing popularity of both genres in the coming years.

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Discursive Intertextuality, Parody, and Mise en Abyme in A.S. Byatt's Short Stories

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Abstract

This essay analyses three short stories from A.S. Byatt's collection Elementals: Stories of Fire and Ice *(1998) in light of several self-reflexive strategies. The short narratives* Crocodile Tears *and Baglady will be discussed from the perspective of "discursive intertextuality," a literary practice that foregrounds a discursive element established and detectable across genres.*

Christ in the House of Martha and Mary *will be examined from the standpoint of intertextuality and mise en abyme. Once again, the study of this narrative will hinge on the discursive aspects of mise en abyme as a meta-generic approach put in place not to indefinitely reiterate "the same" concept, but to show the potentially endless possibilities of interpretation a text may offer its readers.*

Across these short stories, the opposition between fire and ice gets reworked in corresponding dichotomous sets: North vs. South, West vs. Orient, contemplative vs. active life. The specific goal this article sets itself to achieve is to show the contrasting trajectories at play in these short stories. Dense with contrasting and intersecting meta-generic paths, such narratives perform and make visible a double register of devotion/affection and questioning/deconstruction of genre norms in relation to established Anglophone discursive tropes.

Keywords: A.S. Byatt; *Elementals: Stories of Fire and Ice*; metagenre; discursive intertextuality; *mise en abyme*

Introduction

This essay analyses three narratives from A.S. Byatt's *Elementals: Stories of Fire and Ice*, a collection of short stories published in 1998. In *Crocodile tears*, a British woman, following a sudden trauma, escapes to the south of France seeking respite and a chance to heal in peace and isolation. *Baglady* deploys the trope of the confrontation of a Western rational subject with the 'magic' of the Orient. However, the Orient is metonymically represented by a shopping mall, a postmodern reduction of mystery to a prosaic labyrinthine space of final dissolution. Lastly, *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* exemplifies the attempt at rehabilitating instinctual creative skills and a

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sanguine approach to life against the apollonian abilities of intellectual discernment and visual artistic creation.

Throughout several of the narratives that compose the collection, the opposition between fire and ice gets re-worked in corresponding dichotomous sets: North vs. South, West vs. Orient, contemplative vs. active life. This essay aims at discussing Byatt's distinctively own, deliberate deconstruction of such time-honoured cultural and literary tropes through specific metageneric approaches and strategies.

In an article published in the journal *Connotations* this year, Burkhard Niederhoff investigates several important structures and forms of self-reflexivity in literature. After differentiating between 'explicit' and 'implicit' metageneric approaches, Niederhoff further discriminates between *mise en abyme*, transtextuality, violation of genre norms, intertextuality, hypertextuality, and parody (2022: 1-32). This essay adapts Niederhoff's taxonomy and definitions of such categories to shed light on the short stories at hand.

More precisely, *Crocodile Tears* and *Baglady* will be discussed in terms of 'discursive intertextuality' the expression deployed in these pages to indicate a metafictional approach that violates norms that do not, however, refer to a specific text or genre, but to a 'discursive tradition' within a given literary context detectable across genres. I wish to contend that these two short stories self-reflexively meditate on the literary tropes of the 'South of Europe' and 'the Orient' as potentially healing and/or treacherous counter-domains to British civilization – unique constellations of values at the opposite spectrum of those embodied by British culture – which have been endemic to Anglophone fiction throughout the modern centuries. *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* will be discussed in relation to intertextuality and *mise en abyme*.

From this perspective, this essay argues for the fruitfulness of a critical reading of Byatt's short narratives as staging a cognizant interplay between the northern (British) normative subject and its others, a 'literary game' based on enduring and sedimented assumptions deriving from the theoretical postulation of a correspondence between Europe's constitution as centre against an Asian, African, and/or American other on the one hand, and northern Europe's self-positioning as centre of modernity through its discursive otherization of Southern Europe (Dainotto, 2006).

Discursive intertextuality: *Crocodile Tears*

Crocodile Tears, the short story opening the collection, has been described by Alfer and Edwards De Campos as "embrac[ing] the mythology of the Mediterranean," (2010: 154) a reference to the literary trope of the

Mediterranean as the imagined dimension of existential upheaval, healing, and transformation.

The Mediterranean south has been traditionally depicted, in Anglophone contemporary narratives, as a positive realm of otherness, a space for the appreciation of art and its deeper meanings, the ideal location for a self-indulgent holiday and the enjoyment of sensual pleasures, as well as an appropriate location for the elaboration of loss, for sexual initiation, for self-imposed exile. Sometimes, it is portrayed as a suspended dimension, a time capsule, a universe of continuous traditions and unbroken origins in partial discontinuity with the contemporary world.

Crocodile Tears aims at destabilizing this literary trope which has historically partaken in the cultural and literary construction of the (Anglophone) Western subject, its self-appointed place in the world, its privileged taxonomic structures as well as cultural references [1].

As the story opens, we meet a mature couple, Tony and Patricia, visiting an art gallery, engaging in a series of activities that indicate practical familiarity with one another as well as a shared sense of cultural discernment. Not only the context in which Patricia and Tony perform these actions – Bloomsbury, the gardens, the pub lunches – is distinctly English, the subject of their first (and only) conversation is about 'English-ness.' Tony sees a painting he likes, recognizing a 'feeling' in it, as well as a description of a typically English landscape. Patricia, on the contrary, only sees it as banal. She is disturbed by her husband's fascination with what she perceives as a predictable work of art unimaginatively reiterating the 'dullness' and 'greyness' of the English landscape.

For a short while, after entertaining a mild row, Tony and Patricia visit the gallery separately. When Patricia sees Tony again, he is lying dead at the bottom of the gallery's staircase. She overhears from the paramedics that he has had a heart attack. In shock, Patricia leaves the gallery, goes home, packs a bag, goes to the station, and gets on a train. She gets off in Nîmes, in the south of France, where she stays at a hotel spending a few days alone, visiting the city, occasionally shopping, sleeping, eating alone at the restaurant, performing the same actions routinely. This thoughtless repetition of everyday actions seems to be Patricia's way of coping with the trauma of loss.

Throughout her stay in the southern city, Patricia is caught between a Northern and Southern dimension, cold and heat, shadow and light, the unverbalized prospect of opposing resistance to her sadness, and letting go [2]. She also discovers she is not the only visitor trying to reconcile these opposite realms. At the hotel, Patricia meets Nils, a Norwegian ethnologist

who studies "the relations between certain Norse beliefs and customs, and those in the South" (30).

Nils and Patricia share a dislike for 'southern things' such as bullfighting, blood, and the ritual celebration of death. But whereas Nils wishes to understand more about the southern world he has fantasized about for a long time (until he clashes with it after he sees a bullfight performance), Patricia does not, she is skeptical and selective in her approach to the local culture.

When Patricia confesses to Nils that she has not visited the Arena of Nîmes, as she really dislikes the bullfighting shows that it hosts, Nils tells her: "I don't like it either. But I go there, often. I sit there, in the sun, and think. It is a good place to think, for a man from the north who is starved of the sun. The sun pours into it, like a bowl" (31). The sun seems to pour into the entire city, taking away from the protagonists any possibility of hiding. That southern town made up of still visible historical strata sheds light on the personal 'layers' of both characters, slowly bringing to the surface the need to confess to each other the true events that motivated their escape from home.

In a recent analysis of another short story from the same collection, *A Lamia in the Cévennes*, Peter Mathews discusses Byatt's strong disagreement with the romantic notion according to which "passion, with its symbolic heat, is the source from which true beauty springs" (2018: 216). Stories such as *Cold*, but also the character of Maud Bailey in *Possession: A Romance* (1990), destabilize such correspondences creatively reconciling the intellectual sphere with that of warmth and passions:

> Byatt uses her story to examine the dynamic tension between a number of opposing values, from the dichotomy that Keats establishes between emotional art and 'cold philosophy' to the boundaries separating reality and myth, the recurrent tension between realism and abstraction in modern art, and the problematic assumptions about gender that often appear in famous works of art and literature. In this story, Byatt is particularly interested in how the success of a revolutionary discourse can lead to the uncritical acceptance of one side in these cultural dichotomies: art over science, emotion over rationality, revolution over tradition, to name but a few examples. (Mathews 2018: 213)

An analogous intent at destabilizing recognized oppositions is clearly detectable in *Crocodile Tears*. The peculiarity of Byatt's story is in its significant and sustained neutralization of the narrative building bricks that constitute the trope of the 'escape to the South.' For instance, the 'expected' gradual recognition and consequent resolution of personal problems through a fortunate encounter with a local or fellow visitor is constantly

defused. Patricia does not experience 'epiphanies' and her connection to Nils appears weak throughout, fraught with uneasiness and misunderstandings.

Mathews, vis-à-vis *A Lamia in the Cévennes*, describes the protagonist's "refusal to be seduced, along with his resolute insistence on acknowledging only a reality that he can verify with his own senses [that] makes him a forcefully anti-romantic figure, a character caught up in a bizarre fairy-tale who nonetheless uncompromisingly refuses to play by its rules or expectations" (218).

This exact description applies to Patricia, who inflexibly refuses to be seduced by the South and to play the romantic heroine on a trip to self-discovery. Reluctant to let go of her 'Englishness' she finds herself caught not in a fairy-tale, but within the structure of an archetypal narrative that 'expects' her to question previous existential convictions and experiment with passions, but that instead she 'occupies' with her unwillingness and reluctance, eventually proving the point that she is able to find courage and comfort in the encounter with another in spite of not having been seduced, in a conventional way, by the 'otherness' of the place or by someone who embodies its 'spirit' and values.

As she rejected, at the art gallery, a stereotypical notion of 'Englishness' associated with dullness, now Patricia refuses the mythical dimension of a restorative experience taking place in the south of Europe. Nonetheless, the story does ultimately outline a path towards healing and self-acceptance through mutual understanding, as both Patricia and Nils will give one another the support, strength, and motivation necessary to go back to their respective homes and take care of what they left behind on impulse, or out of a necessity for self-preservation.

The accomplishment of this healing parable seems to prove the point according to which authors might undermine a given construct or question it, but by dissecting it, they also 'honour' it and give it its due importance. In the article quoted at the beginning of this essay, Niederhoff observes that "texts may draw the reader's attention to genre conventions not only by means of parody; they may also foreground these conventions by violating or deviating from them" (2022: 11). From this perspective, therefore, "a text may repudiate a genre while simultaneously practicing it" (Niederhoff 2022: 15). This short narrative seems to precisely achieve this: nurture of a given literary trope (the escape to the South) through questioning it.

Parody: *Baglady*

The literary convention that construes and represents the south of Europe as an opposite signifier to British civilization can be characterized as a

discursive formation running parallel to the European discourse on the Orient. Both traditions rest on dichotomizing discursive patterns relying on a taxonomy of places more or less modern, rational, archaic, timeless, and magical. As we will see, the 'magic of the Orient' is a trope that in this short story Byatt ironically manipulates, setting most of the narrative in a shopping mall, banal but sinister, that will 'deconstruct' a northern protagonist with ruthless intent.

Byatt immediately establishes the 'otherness' of the female protagonist, Daphne, vis-à-vis her social environment. In a very characteristic manner, Byatt makes the central narrative conflicts of her short stories emerge from a deeply personal uneasiness within the female protagonist vis-à-vis her surroundings. Just as in the short story *Medusa's Ankles* from her previous collection *The Matisse Stories* (1993), and as in the short narrative that will be discussed next, a woman, sadly aware of her being at odds with social standards of beauty, youth, and grace, expresses her pain, provoking a series of conflicts that will spring from that initial sadness and dissatisfaction:

> Most of the wives are elegant, with silk suits and silky legs and exquisitely cut hair. They chat mutedly, swapping recipes for chutney and horror stories about nannies, staring out of the amber glass wall of the Precious Jade Hotel at the dimpling sea. Daphne Gulver-Robinson is older than most of them, and dowdier, although her husband, Rollo, has less power than most of the other directors. She has tried to make herself attractive for this jaunt and has lost ten pounds and had her hands manicured; but now she sees the other ladies, she knows it is not enough. Her style is seated tweed, and stout shoes, and bird's-nest hair (186).

As the narrative develops, Daphne will be rejected more and more by that world of silky smoothness the other ladies share with the exotic surroundings. When Daphne, in her heavy tweed, visits a 'typically Oriental' shopping mall in the company of those ladies, she struggles to keep up, slowed down and overwhelmed by the mall's imposing size and the quantity of exotic goods on display.

That animated and colourful world, that 'Orient' in miniature size, will progressively deprive Daphne of the markers of her status as a wealthy foreigner – her camera disappears first, then her "smart shoes" (91), purse, and credit cards. The shopping mall gradually deprives her of her property, 'subtracting' from her piece by piece. She will finally lose her sense of time and identity when her watch and documents will be taken away from her.

Lastly, unable to find her way back home, Daphne gets forever caught by that labyrinthine space, by that simulacrum of Oriental opulence:

"It is in this way that she discovers that the Good Fortune Mall extends maybe as far into the earth as into the sky, excavated identical caverns of shop-fronts, jade, gold, silver, silk, lacquer, watches, suiting, bonsai trees and masks and puppets. Lifts that say they are going down go only up. Stairwells are windowless: ground level cannot be found" (192).

This passage reminds us of the mutually exclusive options of being either 'revived' by the Oriental encounter (going up) or imprisoned by it (going down): ground level is lost for good. The impact of the Orient on the rational Western subject is either revitalizing or destructive, but it invariably takes away his/her previous identity, along with his/her fundamental points of reference and certainties.

In this allegorical narrative, the Orient, represented metonymically within the space of an imposing and labyrinthic mall, is indeed 'magical' and 'timeless,' but not at all in a benevolent, 'healing' sense: it progressively entraps its visitor, becoming the stage for the undoing of the Western subject/protagonist.

In this collection of short narratives, the East, the European south, myth, warmth, and the senses are terms opposed to the West, the European North, reality, cold, and intellectual discernment. Although Byatt questions such dichotomies with acumen and subtlety, she does not comment – from a perspective located within the dynamics of her narratives or in a meta-discourse about them – on their making up a coherent cluster of preconceived associations. Hence, she reproposes them in her own language – or, as Pierre Bourdieu would perhaps say, her literary 'idiolect' – adding a distinctive, and quite intricate perspective to a collective perception of the world based on time-honoured taxonomic categories of culture and nature.

As short narratives consciously manipulating such established tropes and clichés, *Crocodile Tears* and *Baglady* are both characterized by the presence of a discursive undercurrent aimed at subverting a set of established dichotomies central to the Anglophone cultural and literary tradition. In simpler words, what these two short stories seem to say, respectively, is that a (cultural and collective) construction of self centred on rationality does not impede understanding and exchange on a deeper level, and that 'sensual disruption' has become as predictable as fake goods in a department store.

Byatt sets out to achieve this disruption partly through a contrived and gimmicky rewriting of these time-honoured tropes. If we agree with Sianne Ngai's definition of literary gimmicks as the "endpoints of poetic decline" (2020: 28) that are, however, "still 'clever": "apparently endowed with enough critical power to work against the agenda of the original

metaphor to contradict or limit the range of reference and meaning it establishes" (2020: 28), we realize that, perhaps, Byatt's literary devices do not truly 'work against the agenda' of such paradigms. Although they succeed in exploring literary archetypes and clichés with sophistication, erudition, and a 'contrary' spirit, as 'indicators of decline' they ultimately mirror a wider crisis of Western categories of thought, and a loss of confidence in their validity.

In particular, *Baglady* seems to parody the trope of a rational Western subject being undone by Oriental lavishness by, once again, 'neutralizing' its narrative components. Firstly, Byatt introduces a protagonist not at all 'centred,' self-assured, and collected, then she lets her evaporate in 'The Orient:' opulent, colourful, and a little bizarre, certainly not warm, or invitingly sensual. Therefore, the dichotomous lait-motif of fire and ice, in this story, gets not only questioned through exposing its narrative elements, by rewriting them in terms of un-centred subject/grotesque environment, but thoroughly reversed (Daphne is a nice lady and the mall is cold and unforgiving).

By questioning and reversing such sedimented categories, Byatt destabilizes the certainties of the modern British/Western subject and his/her place within a taxonomic grid of established values. In this sense, her stories indicate a crisis and, quite literally, a dis-location. The gradual loss of a self-assigned identity within a taxonomic grid of global signification: the Western rational subject and its others; the West and the rest.

Intertextuality and mise en abyme: *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary*

The last short story this essay discusses creates an imagined context for the painting *Kitchen Scene with Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* (1618, oil on canvas, 103.5 x 60.0 cm) by Diego Velázquez:

> In the foreground Velázquez paints an everyday kitchen scene. A maid pounds garlic in a mortar, and other ingredients lie scattered on the table: eggs, a shrivelled red pepper, fish – a traditional symbol associated with Christ – and an earthenware jug probably containing olive oil. An older woman points towards the girl, as if giving her instructions or telling her off for working too hard, or she may be drawing our attention to the figures in the background (The National Gallery, n.d.).

Byatt imagines a busy kitchen in which Dolores, a young and talented cook, works under the supervision of Concepción, an older woman. A young

painter – a fictional Velázquez – is also at work in the same kitchen, observing (and occasionally eating) the dishes the women prepare, portraying what he sees.

Dolores is a young woman with a "stalwart build and […] solid arms" (219) who feels that beauty, wealth, and time for leisure are a constellation of privileges that belong to a social caste she will never be part of. The narrative begins with Dolores trying to conceal the anger and pain brought about by such awareness, and by her status of servitude that does not allow her to have any time for herself: "I want time to think. Not to be pushed around. She studied her face in a shining copper pan, which exaggerated the heavy cheeks, the angry pout. It was true she was no beauty, but no woman likes being told so. God made her heavy, and she hated him for it" (220).

PICTORIAL ELEMENTS ARE DEPLOYED BY BYATT TO COMPOSE A DETAILED NARRATIVE PLOT. FOR INSTANCE, WHEN DOLORES SEES THE PAINTED IMAGE OF HER SENIOR CO-WORKER CONCEPCIÓN, SHE NOTICES HER "GOOD BONES, A FINE MOUTH, A WONDERFUL PATTERN OF LINES ON HER BROW..." (220)

In a dialogue with the young painter, Dolores expresses her frustration at seeing her work unappreciated and her creations quickly and carelessly consumed. Dolores has skills and is instinctively able to recognize beauty, just not in herself: "she felt herself to be a heavy space of unregarded darkness, a weight of miserable shadow in the corner of the room he [the painter] was abstractly recording" (221).

There is an added dimension to the painting – a text within the text – an open frame on the right upper end of it that depicts the biblical episode of *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* as described by Luke in the New Testament. Behind the biblical scene, another door opens, suggesting an infinitely recurring sequence. Formally, the technique of *mise an abyme* would consist of a repetition – within the same visual text – of the same image, but Velázquez's take on it is particularly resonant with the article's argument, as it hinges on 'discourse.' The kitchen scene and the biblical episode are not the same, but they both focus on the notion of manual vs. intellectual labour. The third door hints at, perhaps, the enduring occurrence of this issue throughout history, or the potentially infinite number of interpretations the foregrounded scene may invite.

In the same way as Velázquez opens a window to the biblical story after which the painting is named, so that "in splitting levels of reality across the canvas, the artist (therefore the viewer) is able to transcend time and space and

move from the material to the spiritual in one image" (Boyd 2006: 72), Byatt's Velázquez digresses from the linearity of his conversation with Dolores to open up a corresponding 'space' for the biblical episode within the main narrative [3]. The *mise en abyme* is therefore repeated at the narrative level.

June Sturrock explains that the episode from the Bible has traditionally been read "as representing the active and the contemplative lives respectively, and the narrative seen as establishing the opposition between them and the superiority of the contemplative life" (2016: 474). However, Sturrock points out that Byatt's interpretation rejects this hierarchy by elaborating the dichotomy into complementary terms: two different kinds of active life (the contemplative and the physical), opposed to a passive life. This is how the young Velázquez, in the story, articulates Byatt's interpretation of the episode in the Bible:

> The divide is not between the servants and the served, between the leisured and the workers, but between those who are interested in the world and its multiplicity of forms and forces, and those who merely subsist, worrying or yawning […] the world is full of light and life, and the true crime is not to be interested in it […] The Church teaches that Mary is the contemplative life, which is higher than Martha's way, which is the active way. But any painter must question, which is which? And a cook also contemplates mysteries (226-227).

Through the words of the painter, therefore, Byatt argues for the spiritual importance of creative work, which begins with the capacity to observe (contemplate) and continues with an imaginative and personal elaboration of reality. In creative work – painting as well as cooking – contemplation and action are reconciled and made complementary to one another. If one wished to re-articulate this very notion in terms of, once again, 'fire and ice,' one could state that, according to Byatt's interpretation of this biblical story, there are two passionate ways to live, the contemplative and the active, both opposed to a cold, sterile lack of interest.

I wish to focus, once again, on the discursive aspect of Byatt's interpretation, which I find problematic for two reasons: Velázquez tells Dolores "… the world is full of light and life, and the true crime is not to be interested in it. You have a way in. Take it. It may incidentally be a way out, too, as all skills are" (226). The point is not to have skills, it is the social recognition that goes with them that creates a chance for emancipation. Dolores might possess extraordinary talents, but being a busy servant, she executes without being able to 'reflect' upon them. The possibilities that come with her talents are explained to her by someone who, by virtue of his

profession and the social status that this implies, has had the time to reflect, someone who has been enabled to use his mental faculties: intellectual, imaginative, creative…

In other words, the painter enjoys a social status that usually comes hand in hand with a scholastic disposition – defined by Bourdieu as "time liberated from practical occupations and preoccupations," (2000: 13) – without which one, quite simply, does not have the possibility to elaborate upon reality, creating a meaningful relationship with oneself and the rest of the world [4].

The second problematic aspect is that the conceptual dichotomy between the intellect and the senses, and the ultimate primacy of the first term over the second, is fully restored in Byatt's narration. The young painter has the power not only to create (also given to Dolores, who creates with foods), but the authority to name, to speak, to offer a comprehensive vision of the world in which Dolores figures as an object [5]. Velázquez opens doors on the abyss, but he also controls it, capturing it within the frame.

Byatt sees Dolores' position within Velázquez's vision as 'privileged,' as one of the best features of the painting: "The light hit four things – the silvery fish, so recently dead that they were still bright-eyed, the solid white gleam of the eggs, emitting light, the heads of garlic, half-peeled and life-like, and the sulky, fleshy, furiously frowning face of the girl, above her fat red arms in their brown stuff sleeves" (229).

Another interpretation would read Velázquez's arrangement as making of Dolores one of his 'humble objects.' Dolores appears stuck (literally 'framed,' 'enclosed') between the eternity of biblical disapproval, the contingency of her situation of subdued worker (the older woman possibly scolding her or reminding her of the episode in the Bible), and the gaze of the painter that Dolores returns with mute resentment. Caught between guilt, necessity, and patronizing sympathy, Dolores can only accept her status as graciously as she can.

On a level of symbolic language and representation, just as Velázquez cannot escape ultimately appropriating Dolores for his artistic vision – Dolores does not have time to reflect upon herself but is reflected in the painter's vision – Byatt, in literally creating the vision of the (fictional) Velázquez, maintains – albeit all along rehabilitating its second term – a dichotomy of 'culture' versus 'nature' without acknowledging its function within a process whereby a national, supra-national, or hegemonic entity (a person with a superior position or social status, with scholastic disposition, a colonizing country…) constructs and projects its double image.

Of course, Byatt does not necessarily have to demystify such dichotomies, she can, as I believe she does, competently manipulate them to uncover their contradictions little by little, but she also, at least in part, reiterates them by failing to see, for instance, that in the painting, the only 'human object' is Dolores, who can only look back, for a moment, and catch a glimpse, through the eyes of the painter, of her (reflected and eternalized through the *mise en abyme*) status of deceived subject with 'no time to think.'

Conclusions: Byatt's distinguished subversion

The young Velázquez asks: "the Church teaches that Mary is the contemplative life, which is higher than Martha's way, which is the active way. But any painter must question, which is which? And a cook also contemplates mysteries" (227). In this case, Byatt's main strategy seems to be rehabilitation ("and a cook also contemplates mysteries"). Here is what Bourdieu has to say about the gesture of rehabilitation:

> Just as some celebrations of femininity simply reinforce male domination, so this ultimately very comfortable way of respecting the 'people', which under the guise of exalting the working class, helps to enclose it in what it is by converting privation into a choice or an elective accomplishment, provides all the profits of a show of subversive, paradoxical generosity, while leaving things as they are, with one side in possession of its truly cultivated culture (or language), which is capable of absorbing its own *distinguished subversion*, and the other with its culture or language devoid of any social value and subject to abrupt devaluations (2000: 76, *emphasis added*).

Bourdieu not only argues that language, and literary language, have the power to produce reality "by producing the collectively recognized… representation of existence" (1991: 42), he maintains that literary tropes and their collective recognition have the power to organize our perception and categorization of the world creating a "system of self-evident truths which are untiringly reasserted and collectively guaranteed, and which assigns an essential identity, and therefore a place and rank, to each class of agents" (1991: 100). The expression 'distinguished subversion' is appropriate, I find, to Byatt's questioning of dichotomies in *Elementals* as it does not focus on how such dichotomies, with their dominant and subordinate terms, have been shaping our perception of the world as a hierarchically ordered space.

Aiming at rejecting an acritical acceptance of such constructs, Byatt reshuffles and/or reconciles the terms within them, achieving a critical understanding that entirely avoids exploring the roles such constructs have

played in sustaining a hegemonic – and still current – view of the world, by creating, as Bourdieu specifies, 'places' and 'ranks.'

Mathews maintains that, in her writing, Byatt makes "critically subversive choices" (2018: 220), as she neutralizes and repositions, for instance, the traditional images and meanings established by a long literary tradition of 'journeys to the south.' Whereas I appreciate Byatt's criticism of a thoughtless acceptance of received dichotomies, I am not sure about the 'subversive' aspect of such criticism. Patricia might remain indifferent to the 'rawness' and 'sensuality' of the European south, but these traits are still maintained by the narrative as defining features conflicting with Northern self-control and rationality.

Sometimes, Byatt is successful at subverting these tropes, as when she captures 'the mystery of the Orient' within the space of a merciless mall. At times, however, she reiterates a depiction – however camouflaged by a self-reflexive approach – of, for instance, (southern) otherness as an 'original' and 'primal' space, appropriate for the elaboration of loss. In other words, one is not always sure if Byatt is discrediting such clichés, or just reinventing them, shaping them according to her characteristically cultured and inquisitive literary style.

Niederhoff argues that authors do not usually recur to metageneric techniques to merely endorse or oppose genre conventions: "the most rewarding cases of metagenre create a complex and dynamic debate, a concert of critical and affirmative voices through which a text ultimately achieves a sense of itself" (2022: 15). Byatt's short stories, dense with such contrasting voices, perform and make visible this double register of devotion and questioning of genre norms in relation to established Anglophone discursive tropes.

Notes

[1] My previous research focused on an exploration of representations of southern Europe in Anglophone textual materializations from the last and current century, in literary as well as popular fiction. The starting point of my investigation has been E.M. Forster's literary construction of 'Italy' in his novels and short narratives. This exploration continued with novellas by Daphne du Maurier and Ian McEwan, and with a novel by contemporary author Sarah Hall. See the articles "Such is the Working of the Southern Mind: A Postcolonial Reading of E.M. Forster's Italian Narratives" (2021), "Venice and the Novella: The Construction of Otherness in Daphne du Maurier's *Don't Look Now* and Ian McEwan's *The Comfort of Strangers*" (2021), "La Fiaba Oscura: Narrating Italy in Sarah Hall's *How to Paint a Dead Man*" (2021).

[2] The opposition between 'resisting' and 'letting go' is symbolized by two painted images Patricia sees at the art gallery: a windbreak and an avalanche.
[3] The biblical story is told in Luke 10: 38-42: "Now it came to pass, as they went, that [Jesus] entered a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (reported in J. Sturrock 2016: 474). For Byatt's use of 'embedded tales,' see Jessica Tiffin's essay "Ice, Glass, Snow: Fairy Tale as Art and Metafiction in the Writing of A.S. Byatt" (2006).
[4] Bourdieu points out that the scholastic disposition, "arising from a long historical process of collective liberation, is the basis for humanity's rarest conquests" (2000: 49). Therefore, the point is not that of morally condemning intellectuals, but of "trying to determine whether and how…scholastic disposition and the vision of the world that is enabled by it… affects the thought that it makes possible, and, consequently, the very form and content of what we think" (2000: 49). Therefore, it is not a matter or condemning the painter of the story (or Byatt) for what Bourdieu calls "the laudable concern to rehabilitate" (2000: 75), but to see how the dichotomies that are being mobilized (unquestioningly, or ironically and self-reflexively) have affected our thought and our subjectivities.
[5] Pictorial perspective "in its historical definition, is no doubt the most accomplished realization of the scholastic vision. It presupposes a single, fixed point of view – and therefore the adoption of the posture of a motionless spectator installed at a point (of view) – and also the use of a frame that cuts out, encloses and abstracts the spectacle with a rigorous, immobile boundary" (Bourdieu 2000: 21-22).

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Cultural Monsters in Indian Cinema: The Politics of Adaptation, Transformation and Disfigurement

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Abstract
In India, a popular trope is adapting cultural myths and religious iconographies into visceral images of the monster in literary and visual representations. Cinematic representations of the Indian monster are modelled on existing folklore narratives and religious tales where the idea of the monster emerges from cultural imagination and superstitions of the land. Since it rationalizes several underlying archetypes in which gods are worshipped in their monstrous identities and disposition, the trope of the monster is used in cinema to indicate the transformation from an ordinary human figure to a monstrous human Other. This paper examines cinematic adaptations of monster figures in Malayalam cinema, the South Indian film industry of Kerala. The cultural practice of religious rituals that worship monstrous gods is part of the collective imagination of the land of Kerala through which films represent fearsome images of transformed humans. This article argues that cultural monsters are human subjects that take inspiration from mythical monster stories to perform in a terrifying way. Their monstrous disposition is a persona that is both a powerful revelation of repressed desires and a manifestation of the resistance against certain cultural fears associated with them. The analysis of several Malayalam films, such as Kaliyattam *(1997)* Manichithrathazhu *(1993) and* Ananthabhadram *(2005), reveals how film performance adapts mythological narrative elements to create new cultural intertexts of human monsters that are psychotically nuanced and cinematically excessive.*

Keywords: *cultural monster, otherness, gender monster, adaptation, myth*

Monsters have always been there in all cultures and civilizations. They are entities whose monstrosity is part of the collective imagination through which people, communities, and societies make sense of the strange and the familiar. Monstrosity is relative in the sense that it appeals differently to different contexts. Halberstam states that "the body that scares and appalls changes over time, as do the individual characteristics that add up to monstrosity" (1995: 21). Therefore, one key feature of the identity of monsters is how unique their image and meaning are when they are shaped in different cultural environments and social contexts. Social values, public

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morality, religious superstitions and ethnic beliefs are elements that add emphasis to the imagination of the monstrous. The cultural text of the monster is a result of the juxtaposition of such elements, and the construction of the monstrous undergoes a phase where coordinates of reality and fantasy are incorporated naturally or artificially to a point that clearly establishes a notion of unnaturalness. The unnatural effect, a sense of weirdness to which other existing cultural mores are related and distinguished, makes the monster a cultural phenomenon.

Since the idea of the monster is integrated with the notion of culture, it becomes apparent that the representation and reception of the monster define a communicative discourse about how cultural expressions of an "othered identity" signify cultural values. In popular culture, this communicative discourse centralizes the image of the monster as a possibility, a medium through which one can identify with signs and performances the monstrous texts disseminate and then become involved in the signifying practice of reinterpreting and adapting them. In this process, what is ultimately revealed about the monster is how they fundamentally reflect humanity and its many vulnerabilities, perversions and fears in an essentially magnified form. When discussing the impact of monsters and monster studies, Asa Simon Mittman observed that the monsters "swallow up our cultural mores and expectations, and then, becoming what they eat, reflect back to us our own faces, made disgusting or, perhaps, revealed to always have been so" (2012: 1). The cultural versions of monster narratives, as they appear in popular cultural media like cinema, succinctly reveal the effect of this reflectivity through powerful images and performance.

In India, a popular trope is adapting cultural myths and religious iconographies into visceral images of the monster in literary and visual representations. Cinematic representations of the Indian monster are modelled on existing folklore narratives and religious tales where the idea of the monster emerges from imagination and superstitions of the land. Since it rationalizes several underlying archetypes in which gods are worshipped in their monstrous identities and disposition, the trope of the monster is used in cinema to indicate the transformation from an ordinary human figure to a monstrous human Other. The process of adaptation that produces monsters integrates several cultural narratives and texts into the constructed image of the monster.

This paper examines the cinematic adaptations of monster figures in Malayalam cinema, the South Indian film industry of Kerala. The cultural practice of religious rituals that worship monstrous gods is part of the collective imagination of the land of Kerala through which films represent

fearsome images of transformed humans. This article argues that cultural monsters are human subjects that take inspiration from mythical monster stories to perform in a terrifying way. Their monstrous disposition is a persona that is both a powerful revelation of repressed desires and a manifestation of the resistance against certain cultural fears associated with them. These monsters are human expressions in the basic psychological sense and their version of the cinematic performance is magnified by techniques that employ melodrama, the use of specific costumes, colour patterns, props, and song-dance sequences to create maximum visual intensity. This article investigates how notions of adaptation and performance combine to explain signs that relate to the disfigurement of normal human subjects in their visual transformation. The analysis of several Malayalam films, such as *Kaliyattam* (1997) *Manichithrathazhu* (1993) and *Ananthabhadram* (2005), reveals how film performance adapts mythological narrative elements to create new cultural intertexts of human monsters that are psychotically nuanced and cinematically excessive. For example, an important idea is that of the "gender monster" in such films that transform the performance of sexuality and gender into monstrous forms. They are disfigured versions of underlying identity politics that engender deformed notions of desire, sexuality and social interaction. How disfigurement leads to deformation is analysed at the thematic as well as performative levels to understand how cultural fears lead to the creation of monstrous 'Others'.

Figuring the Monstrous

In the Indian diaspora, the figure of the monster is associated with tradition. Non-human entities are always referred to in epic stories, myths, folklore tales and religious narratives. They get a special place in these discourses because of their being symbolic representations of the evil force, unethical ways of life and the manifestation of material cravings. The monstrous figure was used to balance the good versus bad dichotomy in didactic narratives through which a virtuous hero becomes a cultural icon while the amoral villain becomes the cultural monster. In Hindu Vedic literature and epics like *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, the *devas* and *asuras* are conceptualized as two categories of divine supernatural beings occupying the hero-antihero/god-demon equation. The *devas* appear as soft, intelligent, and virtuous saviours residing in heaven, while the *asuras* are dark, violent, and savage creatures hailing from the underground. The *deva-asura* war is a central theme in Hindu scriptures and contrasting cultural values of *dharma* and *adharma* are attributed to their figures.

The evolution of the *deva-asura* myth through various adaptations and interpretations has led to the destabilization of their dichotomous cultural reception. This is apparent when we analyse the epic texts of *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* where characters are not fixed on solid moral codes, as they often divert from their established forms and transgress the imagined barriers that define their collective separation between the human and the non-human. There are situations when both *devas* and *asuras* show contradicting behavioural patterns that ultimately delineate the humanness of the monster and the monstrousness of the human. According to Jonathan Edelmann (2013), the *deva-asura* dichotomy in Hinduism is about the "narrative depictions of tendencies within our selves", that symbolize contradicting motives, actions and beliefs." This god-antigod conceptualization of the *deva-asura* binary opposition has a spiritual interpretation that says values and virtues are the results of particular choices and actions of individuals rather than being culturally inherent. This is why *asura* kings such as *Mahabali* and *Ravana* are identified as deities and worshipped in temples in India.

Even though the *asuras* can shape-shift into different versions of their personality, what is interesting here is the fundamental demonic form with which they are identified as monsters. For example, *Ravana*, the *asura* king and the major antagonist in the *Ramayana* epic, is figured as a mighty *Rakshasa* (a class of malevolent demigods in Hindu mythology) with a dark complexion, a cruel face with a long and thick moustache, and ten heads and twenty hands. Gigantic statues and sculptures of *Ravana* are used in religious festivals as a sign of his monstrosity; most notably, the ritualistic burning of *Ravana*'s effigy as part of the religious festival of Dusshera in India shows the collective participation of communities in identifying and taming the symbolic monstrous other. In the case of *Ravana*, the corporeality of the monster figure is an adaptation of the human form to an expanded level, where the monster is presented as superior for *being* different. Here, the human quality of the monstrous figure is undeniably significant because it is explicitly visible as a layer. The suggestion is that the monster is not exported from an outer realm but they are beings whose metamorphosis is symptomatic of the change in human appearance as they represent nothing but the very values and expressions familiar to humanity. We give the monsters "anthropocentric significance" and make them "ours" when we "construct or reconstruct them" and "categorize, name, and define them" (Mittman 2012: 1). After all, the myths and stories responsible for the origin of these monsters are narratives emerging from interactions and imaginations of humankind.

The most significant connotation of the "monstrous" in the Indian mythological context is the idea of the divine monster expressed in the figure of a god; culturally accepted, celebrated, and internalized in religious communities and the public sphere. These god-figures carry a sense of distorted human identity in their being when they perpetuate themselves as supreme entities and cultural icons. The images of popular Hindu gods are defined by their ability to promulgate this non-human figuration; many of them have an image with multiple hands carrying weapons and a body that contains unimaginable power ready to erupt through palms, eyes, mouth, and temple. The benevolent gods such as *Ganesha* and *Hanuman* are highly popular in India, and their appearance as a hybrid entity with human and animal forms—*Ganesha* having an elephant head and *Hanuman* being a *vanara* (monkey)—centralizes the notion that the divine is something beyond the realm of the human but also relatable to humans. Another example is the *Narasimha* (the lion-man god), one of the ten reincarnations of Lord Vishnu, as a symbol of the monster and human in-betweenness. The cultural imagination and fantasy reflected in the construction and assimilation of god-monsters and demon-monsters simultaneously point towards the perceived divinity in "abnormal" structures and figures, as long as they stimulate the human imagination.

Performing monsters

The monster archetypes are widely used in art as a source of inspiration in creating strong visual imagery that can produce a significant amount of response in the audience. The appearance of the monstrous figure draws immediate attention to the story because the very presence of the monster creates an act of disturbance that elevates the situation to new heights of emotional outbursts. The monster exerts notions of fear, surprise, mystery, and horror in a way to create spectacles in which the confrontation between the strange and the familiar occurs. Stories of mythical monsters, both divine and demonic, are used in many traditional performative art forms like *Kathakali*, *Theyyam*, *Yakshagana*, puppet plays, and stage dramas in India. Artists who play the epic characters wear specific costumes with strong colours and captivating embroidery to recreate the envisioned horror image of the monster in reality. These impersonations, especially in South Indian performative art forms of *Kathakali* and *Theyyam*, are quite violent in the artistic and performative sense because they aspire to create an authentic adaptation of the mythical version of the monster by the actor's excessive use of facial expressions and physical actions.

In *Theyyam,* which is performed in a ritualistic fashion based on folklorist traditional myths, the performer is literally viewed as a manifestation of the divine monstrous who invokes ancient spirits and gods through his/her performance. *Theyyam* is performed in northern regions of the South Indian state of Kerala where the art form is seen as a cultural symbol of the region. It incorporates the unique tradition, beliefs and regional politics of the villages into the art form. The monstrosity reflected in the visual and performative aesthetics of *Theyyam* is considered sacred, and its being in the presence of the *Theyyam* figure when it appears in village homes and public spaces allows people to seek blessings from the ritual monster. Mothers used to scare their children by making stories about *Theyyam* figures capturing and abducting disobeying children. The performative aspects of *Theyyams* often go to extreme forms such as the performer literally walking on fire and doing acrobatic stunts. The *Theyyam* performances are known for their indigenous uniqueness which allows people from lower caste communities to perform the sacred art form. All such violations and transformations make the monstrous text of this art form a cultural intertext in which the cultural fear of the monstrous other is primitive, sacred, and divine at the same time. Timothy Beal (2020) observes this paradoxical existence of monsters in culture:

> Monsters are in the world but not of the world. They are paradoxical personifications of otherness within sameness. That is, they are threatening figures of anomaly within the well-established and accepted order of things. They represent the outside that has gotten inside, the beyond-the-pale that, much to our horror, has gotten into the pale (Beal 2020: 297).

In 1997, the cultural background of *Theyyam* was used in the Malayalam film *Kaliyattam* (The Play of God), directed by Malayalee filmmaker Jayaraj. The film was a regional adaptation of Shakespeare's *Othello* where Jayaraj uses the visual language of *Theyyam* to reframe the cultural monster as a manifestation of the deep psychological conflict ingrained in character personalities. It explores the personal and social realms of the human psyche to unearth the moral and cultural dispositions that drag the individual into total ruin. Malayalam film critic C. S. Venkiteswaran (2019) observes that:

> The setting of the film in the theyyam milieu opens visual possibilities in terms of spectacular night performances, masks, movements, orgiastic rhythms and colourful costumes. [...] These theyyam figures also invoke various legends – stories about valour and sacrifice, kinship feuds and rivalry – that constitute the collective memories of the region (Venkiteswaran 2019: 81).

The film adapts Shakespeare's text into a unique cultural context in which the monstrous is a combination of myth, history, fate and human misery. The film's protagonist *Kannan Perumalayan/Othello* (played by Suresh Gopi) is a *Theyyam* performer whose life is transformed to tragic proportions when subjected to the mischievous acts of Paniyan/Iago, who takes advantage of the anxieties, desires and fears—the basic human vulnerabilities that lead to the eventual doom of the characters. Here, the figure of *Theyyam* is used as a façade that not only hides these vulnerabilities in their human form but also expresses them in the monstrous form. When the truth about how he is deceived by Iago was revealed to him, Perumalayan ultimately descends into madness and throws himself into the fire to commit ritual suicide, and the final grand performance of the *Theyyam* in all its heightened monstrosity and ferociousness becomes the closing ceremony. Here, the monstrous image of the *Theyyam* manifests the cultural fears residing in the social consciousness under the form of jealousy, infidelity, betrayal, suspicion and revenge. Venkiteswaran (2019) notes that:

> The spirit of soldierly valour underlying the play is substituted in the film by the glory of donning key theyyam roles which turn humans into gods. The customs surrounding theyyam, which is both a ritual of invocation to village or community deities and ancestors, and an art form, and the ritual purity it demands from the performer and his wife; the rites and acts of penance that go with it; the awe that it inspires in its audience; the sacred space in which it is performed; and the elaborate process of facial make-up, costumes and preparatory rituals all constitute the visual and narrative elements in the film, portrayed through sensitive cinematography which lingers on the colours and contours without eroticising or sensationalising. The tragic drama of suspicion, jealousy, desire, violence and blind ambition is made more intense and poignant in the midst of the sacred rituals and verdant surroundings (2019: 81).

The performance of the monster as an integration of cultural practices can be seen in other films as well. Santhosh Sivan's *Ananthabhadram* (2005) was such a film in which dark fantasy, black magic, and horror elements are infused with the dance moves of *Theyyam* and *Kathakali*, and Kerala's own martial arts form, *Kalarippayattu*. The film takes its narrative to the indigenous ancestral lands where mysterious temples, local superstitions, and ancient curses make an atmospheric context for local magicians and tricksters to perform black magic and rituals to gain material wealth. Stories of cultural monsters appear in the film in the form of myths about *Yakshis* (the female ghost), the *Nagamanikyam* (the precious jewel on a mysterious

serpent's head), and *aabhichaaram* (the erotic black magic)—all referring to regional fantasies and folklorist traditions. Ananthan (Prithviraj), the protagonist from the modern era comes back to the village and encounters the supernatural and the monstrous in these myths. In the main plot of the film, the black magician Digambaran (Manoj K. Jayan), resorts to his mischievous acts to get the *Nagamanikyam*. However, the film's emphasis on Digambaran's anti-hero character later reveals the tragic love story between him and his lover Subhadra. When Subhadra was accidentally killed by his own hands, Digambaran becomes the monster he is now; the repressed grief and guilt control his actions to unconventionally violent proportions because he believes that he can revive the lover's dead body using black magic and the power of *Nagamanikyam*. In a visually captivating song-dance sequence in the film, Digambaran uses black magic to seduce Bhama (Riya Sen), with the intention of offering her as a blood sacrifice for the slight hope that makes Subhadra come back to life. The cultural fear about the death of a loved one is central to monster narratives because death is perceived as the ultimate unknown and people find reasons to make the dead not really dead (Landis 2011: 17). Digambaran pushes his limits, goes mad at times in his search for reviving the dead body of his lover, which he preserved for rituals using magic spells, ancient tantric chants, and specific dance moves. Shades of Digambaran's monstrous image, his loud cries and actions are desperate attempts to revoke the memories of the past that haunts the monster as much as the monster channels them to the people who surround him to block him without understanding the hidden reality that begets the monstrous.

The gender monster – performance of transformation and disfigurement

Stephen T. Asma notes that "monsters can stand as symbols of human vulnerability and crisis, and as such they play imaginative foils for thinking about our own responses to menace" (290). The repression of a traumatic past and the desire to outperform its haunting influence is what essentially signify the performative logic of cultural monsters. In the 1993 Malayalam film *Manichithrathazhu*, the female protagonist Ganga (Sobhana) returns from the city to her husband's traditional home where she finds the colours of the past in an ancient tragic myth that involves the killing of Nagavalli, a classical dancer, at the hands of a feudal lord. This makes the repressed childhood traumas of Ganga come into play as she was alone growing up with her busy parents not visiting her let alone caring for or loving her. She was looked after by her grandmother who let Ganga familiarize herself with the mystical stories, myths, rituals and regional superstitions. Ganga soon transforms into Nagavalli—the psychological transition of the self into

another, and the film later reveals that she suffers from dissociative identity disorder. This transformation is aided by the cultural myth of Nagavalli and adopting all corresponding elements that are used in its visualization.

Dennis Todd observes that monsters are "liminal creatures, straddling boundaries between categories we wish to keep distinct and separate, blurring distinctions, haunting us with the possibility that the categories themselves are ambiguous, permeable" (1995: 156). The figure of Nagavalli is one of the greatest female monsters in Malayalam cinema. The enactment of the monstrous feminine through Nagavalli evokes the cultural myth of the female ghost, called *Yakshi*, the human-like supernatural being with the power to seduce, possess, protect and destroy. The possessed female body becomes a *Yakshi* once she is capable of wandering through villages seeking *moksha* (deliverance) through revenge. The *Yakshi* stories focus on the transformation of a traditionally beautiful young woman into a grief-stricken dead entity that aspires to murder victims (often male) and drink their blood to satiate her thirst for retribution. Like many other monsters, the *Yakshi* can shape-shift into disguises under which she hides her monstrous identity and reveals only when it is necessary. *Yakshi* is often considered a gothic romantic ideal whose body is desired and feared at the same time. The 'monster' is an entity where one can apply the 'aesthetics of pleasurable fear' (Sedgwick 1986: 11). The *Yakshi*'s cultural image represents this pleasurable fear, the type of fear that lets the male spectator imagine a double identity of the woman—the seductress and the monstrous. This refers to the oppression of women by either romanticizing them as a loveable perfection of beauty and care or vilifying them for crossing the patriarchal boundaries to express too much of themselves. This is exactly what defines the identity of Ganga/Nagavalli in *Manichithrathazhu*. Ganga is the ideal romantic subject who is always available to her husband but Nagavalli is the cultural other, the disfigured version of the feminine whose violent expressions subvert the former. The ritualistic representation of the Yakshi is a mirror image of the real, and therefore, the cinematic form itself is a "ritual as reality"; something that is dreadful and attractive at the same time where "something real" penetrates the fantasy and "the natural conceals the supernatural" (Tyler 1960: 82).

The possession of the monster, the cultural invasion of the repressed other into the human ideal, brings disfigurement as a conceptual feature of the monster. The liminal figure of the monster collapses social boundaries, invoking cultural anxieties and disrupting conservative categories (Macaluso 2019). The 'gender monster' emerges as a manifestation of resistance when gender stereotypes repress certain gender identities in a

heteronormative social structure. Judith Halberstam reminds us in *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* that monsters are heterogeneous figures capable of not only representing "any horrible trait that the reader feeds into the narrative" (1995: 21), but also, because of their radical irreducibility, of allowing for new ways of imagining "social resistance" (23). Despite its cultural value as positive or negative, the monstrous is always a form of abnormality. It is a "strange distorted creature" with contradictory traits that "confuse the categories of rationality and order, creating its own logic and dominating its own space" (Braudy 2016: 19). Since the monster is the embodiment of this abnormality, the figure is always kept at a distance for observation, worship, exorcism and destruction. Malevolent monsters are worshipped to bring havoc to the mortal world. They are, as we have already seen, fundamentally human beings with emotional vulnerability in their cores and looking for a way out through cultural vessels. They use all sorts of cultural paraphernalia with which psychotically or sexually disturbed individuals adapt themselves to a new form for survival.

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Cultural Relativism and "Our Way of Life": Patricia Highsmith's *The Tremor of Forgery*

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Abstract
Like Meursault in The Stranger *(1942) by Albert Camus, the 34-year-old protagonist of Patricia Highsmith's* The Tremor of Forgery *(1969) is almost certain of having killed an Arab in self-defence but feels no remorse for the deed except as it is judged by other Americans within his orbit of Western influence. While visiting Tunisia on what is apparently his first trip overseas, novelist Howard Ingham wrestles with the alterity of an Arab culture during the Six-Day War in the Middle East while at the same time criticizing the parochialism of a countryman who broadcasts propaganda about "Our Way of Life." Ingham soon embraces, albeit equivocally, a perspective of cultural relativism, but his doing so is largely the dodge of a doubly dispossessed stranger in a strange land.* Tremor *thus figures as one of Highsmith's "texts of exile," as Fiona Peters has called it, that ends with Ingham's anti-climactic return home to renew a relationship with his former wife.*

Keywords: *cultural relativism, American ethnocentrism, nationalistic chauvinism, Arab culture, moral fraudulence*

In addition to her "Ripliad" series set in Italy and France, five of Patricia Highsmith's other seventeen novels—*A Game for the Living* (1958), *The Two Faces of January* (1964), *Those Who Walk Away* (1967), *The Tremor of Forgery* (1969), and *Small g: A Summer Idyll* (1995)—take place outside the United States, and all involve American travellers who intend to return home after their time overseas. So does Howard Ingham, the 34-year-old protagonist of *Tremor*, but he differs from his fictional peers in wrestling with the radical alterity of an Arab culture during the Six-Day War in the Middle East. With three books to his credit titled *The Power of Negative Thinking*, *The Gathering Swine*, and *The Game of "If,"* Ingham has left Manhattan for Tunisia because, when the rights to a film adaptation of his most recent novel sold for $50,000, director John Castlewood persuaded him as the script writer that Africa's northernmost republic was a "simpler and more visual" milieu for a tale summarized as follows: "The young man who didn't get the girl married someone else, but wreaked vengeance on his successful rival in a most horrible way, first seducing his wife, then ruining the husband's business,

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then seeing that the husband was murdered." Apparently on his first trip abroad, Ingham supposes that "Such things could scarcely happen in America, […] but this was in Tunisia" (Highsmith 2011: 5). The reductionism of that outlook is self-evident. The rest of Highsmith's narrative is devoted to a parable about how this main character convinces himself that he subscribes, however equivocally, to a perspective of cultural relativism after recognizing the myopia of ethnocentric and nationalistic chauvinism [1].

Typifying the latter stance in *The Tremor of Forgery* is Francis J. Adams, a widower from Connecticut who befriends Ingham at a Tunisian seaside resort. Morality for this expatriate is Manichean, a matter of absolute good versus absolute evil. In this conviction, born of unquestioning faith in democracy, Adams considers himself "an unofficial ambassador for America" who "spread[s] goodwill . . . and the American way of life. Our way of life" (Highsmith 2011: 15). Because of his new acquaintance's fondness for the last phrase, Ingham privately dubs him "OWL." Later, when he learns that his neighbor at La Reine de Hammamet's bungalows receives a modest stipend from "a small group of anti-Communists behind the Iron Curtain" to broadcast tape-recorded propaganda (63), Ingham wonders whether Adams might possibly be a credulous dupe. Although Highsmith richly develops this character, Adams epitomizes a parochialism that elsewhere she indicts as a manifestation of "the American's everyday or garden variety of schizophrenia" (1990: 40), paraphrased by David Cochran as "the dark underside of post-World War II American culture" (1997: 157).

For his part, Ingham thinks that he is free of all such ideological blinders and ingrained traits, but in unacknowledged ways the novelist typifies his homeland. One has already been noted: underneath his fashionable skepticism, he cannot imagine that the revenge-driven plot of the film to be titled *Trio* could occur in his native land. He is, in other words, a dyed-in-the-wool believer in American exceptionalism by any other name. A second giveaway is that, after arriving in Tunisia by way of Paris pending Castlewood's joining him there, Ingham continues to be disconcerted by seeing "single young men or pairs of boys holding hands" in public (Highsmith 2011: 2). Although the director had cautioned him that "[h]omosexual relationships had no stigma here" (3), the supposedly tolerant but heteronormative writer still is challenged by adapting to a country with different mores than his own. A third and more revealing indicator of Ingham's acculturation is his fascination with the chicanery of white-collar crime. While awaiting Castlewood's delayed arrival, he is drafting a new novel, the working title of which is the same as Highsmith's [2], about a man named Dennison who embezzles vast sums from the bank

of which he is a director before giving most of the money away. As Ingham works on his manuscript, he thinks that "whatever was right and wrong […] was what people around you said it was" (172). The shallowness of this view is much like that of Sydney Bartleby in *A Suspension of Mercy* (1965) when he persuades himself that Mrs Grace Lilybanks' death from a heart attack, for which he is circumstantially responsible, is ultimately the result of "conditioning sets of attitudes" (Highsmith 2001: 135). This anti-hero decides that "Religions were attitudes, too, of course. It made things so much clearer to call these things attitudes rather than convictions, truths, or faiths. The whole world wagged by means of attitudes, which might as well be called illusions" (154-55). Howard Ingham in *Tremor* entertains a similarly convenient outlook that frees him from the difficulty of construing moral responsibility in terms of universal or transcendent values.

In the meantime, while plugging away at his new novel, Highsmith's transplanted American tries not to reflect on Charlotte Fleet, from whom he was divorced eighteen months ago, and the epistolary silence of Ina Pallant, a 28-year-old writer of television plays for CBS who, like Ingham, has been divorced and whom he is considering marrying. During this hiatus of contact with all that he left behind, Howard Ingham becomes increasingly subject to a diffuse anxiety. When not engaged in drafting his new book, he diverts himself for nearly a month by writing unanswered letters and conversing with OWL in the evenings over drinks. During that interim he also befriends an openly gay Danish painter of abstracts named Anders Jensen, through whom he begins to discover a tenuous new freedom from Western codes of morality. Shortly before then, however, Ingham receives news that film director John Castlewood committed suicide in, of all places, his own Manhattan apartment. The writer's professional plans now more than ever in limbo, he tries to readjust because "[s]uddenly, everything seemed so doubtful, so vague" (Highsmith 2011: 38). With that abrupt sense of indeterminacy, though, comes a cautious freedom from regimented expectations, a kind of Hegelian *Aufhebung*. In Adams's company Ingham makes the acquaintance of Jensen at a nearby restaurant called Chez Melik and later, after visiting the painter's spartan quarters, is shocked upon his departure to find the corpse of a Tunisian whose throat has been slashed. At the alley's far end Ingham then sees a figure whom he recognizes from a previous encounter, an "old humpbacked Arab in […] baggy trousers," standing near the partially open rear window of his car. The man escapes when Ingham yells at him, but a blood fury suddenly seizes the visiting American. "'Son of a bitch, I hope it *kills* you!' he shouted, so angry now that his face burnt. 'Bastard son of a bitch!'" (56).

The episode is pivotal because it anticipates Ingham's moral quandary during his time abroad. Writing plaintively to Ina that he is "horribly lonely" and realizing that "he had no real purpose in being in Tunisia—he could be writing his book anywhere" (Highsmith 2011: 58, 69), Ingham on the Fourth of July receives a letter from Pallant explaining that the 26-year-old Castlewood killed himself because he had fallen in love with Ina after a brief affair and felt guilty. The report of this imbroglio strikes Highsmith's overseas visitor as preposterous and not a little absurd. Its most immediate effect is a new slant on his novel-in-progress:

> His theme was an old one, via Raskolnikov, through Nietzsche's superman: had one the right to seize power under certain circumstances? That was all very interesting from a moral point of view. Ingham was somewhat more interested in the state of Dennison's mind, in his existence during the period in which he led two lives. He was interested in the fact that the double life at last fooled Dennison: that was what made Dennison a nearly perfect embezzler. Dennison was morally unaware that he was committing a felony, but he was aware that society and the law, for reasons that he did not even attempt to comprehend, did not approve of what he was doing. (76-77)

This realization of his plot's Dostoevskian and Nietzschean ramifications temporarily inspires Ingham, but his elation is checked when he again sees a "dead ringer" of Abdullah, "an old Arab in baggy red pants," near his quarters at Hammamet (77). Later that evening the writer discovers that his quarters have been burglarized, and he immediately suspects Abdullah as the perpetrator. Unable to verify the culprit, Ingham whiles away several more days, which include an unconsummated sexual tryst with nine-year-younger Kathryn Darby from Pennsylvania, before at midnight awakening to see a stooped figure entering his bungalow via an unlocked front door. Clumsily seizing his typewriter from a work table, Ingham heaves it against the interloper's turbaned head. "Ninety percent sure" that the victim is Abdullah (108), Ingham now faces an unwelcome trial of interrogation by Adams and Pallant, who insist on his need for accountability.

At this juncture, a third of the way into her narrative, Highsmith sets up a latent tension between two radically different codes of value. Arab culture, the text repeatedly suggests, does not value human life highly and, faced with many deprivations, condones cruelty toward animals. Anders Jensen emphasizes the last point when he explains to Ingham that his Tunisian neighbours deliberately dropped a large rock on his German shepherd from an overhead window, breaking the dog's leg, and later when

Hasso goes missing Ingham sympathizes with a distraught Jensen by denouncing all Arabs. When the protagonist reflects on the near certainty of his responsibility for Abdullah's death, the incident fades in importance, at least temporarily, when Mokta and the other local attendants at La Reine de Hammamet profess no awareness of or concern about the thief's disappearance. In sharp counterpoint is the reaction of Francis Adams and later Ina Pallant when they learn of the episode. While Ingham's typewriter is being repaired in Tunis, OWL presses his fellow American, who is entertaining the "un-Christian thought" that Abdullah was worth "next to nothing, probably" (Highsmith 2011: 116), about the incident. More guarded now in his exchanges with Adams, Ingham finds himself badgered to be accountable because in OWL's words "you can't throw off your American heritage just because you've spent a few weeks in Africa." Hearing Adams invoke his supposed birthright, the writer muses that "Jensen wouldn't take this load of crap" (156), but not long thereafter Ingham reflects that in Tunisia "the whole country" was "against his grain" (169). In the language of Exodus 2:22, this *Entfremdung* makes Howard Ingham a doubly dispossessed "stranger in a strange land," validating Fiona Peters' classifying *The Tremor of Forgery* as one of Highsmith's "texts of exile" (2011: 1).

During the interim before Ina Pallant's arrival, however, Ingham has undergone a subtle shift in orientation. It begins with a three-day camelback excursion he makes with Jensen to a desert oasis known as Gabes. On the eve of his departure Ingham remembers the following passage from Norman Douglas's *Fountains in the Sand* (1912) about an old Italian gardener whom Douglas had encountered in Tunisia: "He had travelled far in the Old and New Worlds; in him I recognized once again that simple mind of the sailor or wanderer who learns, as he goes along, to talk and think decently; who, instead of gathering fresh encumbrances on Life's journey, wisely discards even those he set out with" (Highsmith 2011: 130-31). Recalling the *aperçu*, Ingham muses that "It was strange, he couldn't explain it, to be floating like a foreign particle (which he was) in the vastness of Africa, but to be absolutely sure that Africa would enable him to bear things better" (131). The last phrase, as preceding sentences make explicit, refers to Ingham's concern about "any bad reaction" to his anticipated breaking off a relationship of convenience with Ina, one that is now beginning to seem riddled by mutual self-deception. While with Jensen in the arid desert, Ingham confesses one starlit night that he may have killed Abdullah and is reassured by the Dane's admonition to forget about the incident because "That particular Arab was a swine. I like to think you got him, because it makes up a little for my dog" (145). Gratified by this response, which tacitly

equates Abdullah's probable death with an injury to a dog, the American becomes increasingly receptive to dismissing the issue of his moral obligations under what he deems extenuating circumstances.

Since the original release of *The Tremor of Forgery* more than one scholarly study has noted its influence by such other existential novels set in North Africa as Albert Camus's *The Stranger* (1942), Paul Bowles's *The Sheltering Sky* (1949), and Albert Cossery's *Proud Beggars* (1955). Given its probing of Howard Ingham's first visit overseas, *Tremor* scouts the psychological terrain of relativism's appeal to the main character. Joanna Stolarek remarks that the novel analyses "the problem of self, identity, crime and ethics in the context of cultural shock, particularly the clash between the Western and Arab world" (2018: 151), but Highsmith in my judgment is going further by suggesting the shallowness, indeed the vacuity, of Ingham's pragmatic embrace of a foreign ethos. That disclosure occurs primarily through his interactions with Ina Pallant upon her arrival in Tunisia in mid-August. Before her visit Howard, upon returning from his desert expedition, finds the "neat blue and white cleanliness" of his seaside bungalow at Hammamet distasteful and makes tentative plans, as he tells Jensen, to rent "A couple of rooms. Something Arab. Something like you've got" (Highsmith 2011: 147, 159). At about the same time he drafts a letter to Ina in longhand on 28 July noting that a trip like the one he has taken to Gabes "changes one's thinking… {I]t makes people see things more clearly, or not so close up" (149). The clear implication is that Ingham feels that he has undergone a Blakean cleansing of perception, and shortly thereafter he moves into his new quarters. "It was as if he had shed, suddenly, his ideas about cleanliness, spotless cleanliness, anyway, and of comfort also" (164). Readers also learn that in his new residence Ingham occupies himself with writing while wearing a terrycloth robe soaked in cold water, prompting even the ascetic Jensen to ask kiddingly, "Are you going to buy yourself a jubbah next?" (171). Upon being invited to visit Ingham in his new rooms, Adams takes the liberty of saying to his host, "You seem to be punishing yourself with this—'going native,'" adding that "It's no way for a civilized man . . . to do penance" (168). But that is just the rub for Ingham: he no longer wishes to be deemed "civilized," with all the moral imperatives implied by that word. By adapting to the austere living conditions of Jensen, Ingham thinks that he is making a decisive break from the conventions of a world he has supposedly left behind.

The protagonist's reorientation just prior to Ina's arrival in Tunis on 13 August is reflected in yet another fresh take on his novel in progress. Whereas earlier he was intrigued by the Dostoevskian and Nietzschean

nuances of Dennison's "double life," Ingham now finds that his thoughts have taken a "better turn" (Highsmith 2011: 170). As he reflects on the story of Dennison's embezzlement of $750,000 over twenty years, the novelist decides that his working title is no longer apt. The manuscript thus undergoes a thematic swerve: "It was Ingham's idea to leave the reader morally doubtful as to Dennison's culpability. In view of the enormous good Dennison had done in the way of holding families together, starting or helping businesses, sending young people through college, not to mention contributions to charities—who could label Dennison a crook?" (170-71). This turn in Ingham's storyline is obviously a vicarious projection of his struggle with moral responsibility for Abdullah's death. After the above excerpt, for example, a lengthy passage makes clear the American writer's transformation while in Tunisia:

> Now and again Ingham caught a glimpse of his own stern face in the mirror he had hung on the wall by the kitchen door. His face was darker and thinner, different. He was at these moments conscious… of being alone, without friends, or a job, or any connection with anybody. …Then, being more than half Dennison at these moments, he experienced something like the unconscious flash of a question: "Who am I, anyway? Does one exist, or to what extent does one exist as an individual without friends, family, anybody to whom one can relate, to whom one's existence is of the least importance?" It was strangely like a religious experience. It was like becoming nothing and realizing that one was nothing anyway, ever. It was a basic truth. (171-72)

This Sartrean moment of self-reckoning [3], however, is almost immediately buffered by an express letter from Ina Pallant announcing her imminent arrival. Upon receiving the news, Ingham promptly arranges accommodations for her at the Reine de Hammamet and reverts automatically to his conventional American persona in interacting with Ina.

The reunion becomes the occasion for each one's recognizing the conditionality of their relationship, especially as it has been shaped by cultural norms. Initially, though, all goes well. Upon her arrival, Ina rushes into Howard's arms, and seeing stress lines under her eyes he is solicitous about Ina's younger brother Joey, wheelchair-bound by multiple sclerosis, for whom she has been a caretaker at their parents' home in Brooklyn Heights. That same evening, after she tells Howard that he has won the O. Henry Award for a short story titled "We Is All," they enjoy mutually fulfilling sex, prompting him to wonder "Why had he thought he didn't love her?" (Highsmith 2011: 183). Their harmony becomes strained, however,

when Ina visits Howard's primitive "Arab" quarters and meets his upstairs neighbor Jensen. Wholly unable to fathom Ingham's preference for these primitive living arrangements and critical of Jensen for being "queer," Pallant gravitates to the story of Abdullah's disappearance about which Adams has fully informed her. Still persuaded that Ina "was the woman he was going to marry… and live with for the rest of his life" (202), Howard finds his reservations mounting when she presses him to tell "the whole story about that night Abdullah was killed" (218). Unable to explain his unconcern about the man's fate in terms of the novel he is completing, which explores "whether a person makes his own personality and his own standards from within himself, or whether he and the standards are the creation of the society around him" (218-19), Ingham finds himself increasingly exasperated by Ina's cross-examination of his actions during the Abdullah incident. He also is quietly furious with OWL for reinforcing her sense, in Adams's words, of "the value of a clear conscience" (228). Even though Ingham asks Pallant to marry him and confesses to his actions involving the invasion of his bungalow, both seem wearily to recognize that their union would be ill-advised. Before he bids farewell to Ina at the Tunis airport, however, Ingham has begun to think of his former wife Lotte, with whom he "had never quarreled" because "they'd never talked about anything at all complex" (256).

If any further proof is needed that Highsmith's overseas traveller is a poor moralist who, after his exposure to cultural relativism, ends by subscribing to nothing more substantial than anomie leavened by nostalgic sentimentalism, the novel's denoue-ment drives the point home forcibly. Receiving a forwarded letter from Lotte explaining that her California marriage had foundered because of her second husband's infidelity, Howard plans to seek her out again in New York, hoping to rekindle their relationship and visit Jensen in Copenhagen after Christmas. Before this sardonic variation on Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946) concludes, even Jensen's lost dog Hasso has miraculously reappeared and is being nursed back to health. The final page of *Tremor* has Ingham parting from Adams at the airport and saying, "You know—I think you saved my life here" ("It may have sounded a bit gushy," adds Highsmith's third-person narrator, "but Ingham meant it"), yet OWL's kindly dismissive response may be more to the point: "Nonsense, nonsense" (Highsmith 2011: 289). Shortly before his return to the United States, Ingham "had the awful feeling that in the months he had been here, his own character or principles had collapsed or disappeared. What was he?... Ingham now felt he couldn't think, if his life depended on it, of one principle by which he lived" (267).

Being a novelist prone to identifying with his protagonists, however, Ingham retitles his finished book *Dennison's Lights*, which ends as follows:

> Dennison was forty-five now. Prison had not changed him. His head was unbowed, not at all bloodied, just a trifle dazed by the ways of the world that was not his world. Dennison was going to find a job in another company, an insurance company, and start the same financial manoeuvrings all over again. Other people's hardships were intolerable to Dennison, if merely a little money could abolish them. (276)

In the course of his nearly three-month stay in Tunisia, it apparently does not occur to Ingham that the phrase "Other people's hardships" just might apply to Abdullah, but ethnocentrism however disguised from oneself has its blind spots. In short, the author of *Dennison's Lights* does not emerge in Highsmith's finale as a particularly enlightened or self-aware citizen of the world, Ingham's sole goal for the future being to resuscitate his former life with Lotte [4].

In *The Crime Novel: A Deviant Genre*, Tony Hilfer quotes Highsmith as saying during a 1983 interview: "I suppose the reason I write about crime is simply that it is very good for illustrating moral points of life. I am really interested in the behavior of people surrounding someone who has done something wrong, and also whether the person who has done it feels guilty about it, or just, 'so what'" (1990: 123). Like Meursault in *The Stranger* by Camus, Ingham in *Tremor* kills an Arab in self-defence but experiences no remorse for the deed except as it is judged by others within his orbit of Western influence. Highsmith's overseas visitor to Tunisia would fain dismiss his indifference to Abdullah's almost certain death at his hands as congruent with the response of indigenous employees like Mokta at La Reine de Hammamet, but at the end of his experiment in "going native," as OWL puts it, he yields to the compulsion to reinvent his life with Lotte in the United States where it went astray a year and a half ago. Hardly a consistent exemplar of cultural relativism, Howard Ingham reverts to the American habits that have shaped him. So interpreted, *The Tremor of Forgery* is wholly congruent with Hilfer's claim that "Highsmith rings the changes on her themes of the indeterminacy of guilt, the instability of identity, and above all the heavily compromised, even reversible binary opposition of deviance and the norm in all her novels" (124).

That observation goes far to explain why, when pigeonholed as an author of crime fiction, Highsmith eludes the genre's morphology and usual trajectory. As biographer Andrew Wilson con-tends, "Critics have wrestled

with Highsmith's place in modern literature since the 1960s, when book reviewers and editors first began to notice that her novels were rather different [from] the mass of pulp fiction being churned out by crime writers. Even today, trying to 'locate' her in a literary context or tradition is almost impossible" (2003: 4). Fiona Peters takes the case further. Regarding the common predilection for describing Highsmith as a crime novelist, Peters contends that "her texts are never 'about' solving a puzzle, feeding the reader with clues at apposite intervals or allowing a reader to engage in amateur detection. […] Highsmith is an enigma who deserves more than the dearth of critical material that her work has attracted" (2011: 1). Perhaps in part because of that very difficulty—the startlingly original, maverick, or contrarian streak in Highsmith's *oeuvre*—Mark Seltzer relies on her heavily as a subversive countervoice to the hegemonic primacy of what he calls the post-World War II "official world." Even a more or less conventional novel such as Highsmith's *The Cry of the Owl* (1962), set in Pennsylvania, bristles with systematic inversions of "normalcy" and "deviancy" (see Snyder). Because of her adroit exploration of this subject in the geopolitical context of the late 1960s, both Graham Greene and Terrence Rafferty have heralded *The Tremor of Forgery* as Highsmith's finest novel (Greene 2011: xi; Rafferty 1988: 75). The second of these critics observes that amid its "shimmery void" of inaction and irresolution *Tremor* figures as an ultimately "nihilistic" text, largely because of its protagonist's moral fraudulence (75, 74).

Subsequent analysts of Highsmith's *oeuvre* have noted its dialectic of period-specific alienation and often pathological engagement via a proxy agent, essentially the dynamic of her acclaimed first novel *Strangers on a Train* (1950). Writing in 2010, for example, John Dale argues that "Highsmith's rather unique contribution lies precisely in her complex and compelling portrayal of a central duality or ambivalence in the individual's attempt to interface with the world" (406). In the case of *Tremor*, which Dale considers "Highsmith's most eloquent exploration of this theme" (409), novelist Howard Ingham figures as a deeply confused, self-deceived dupe of his native America's boasted pride in "Our Way of Life," a carryover from the conformist 1950s, and its slowly emerging awareness of cultural relativism during the ensuing decade. In deciding to return to his homeland and renew his relationship with a former wife, Highsmith's protagonist is temporizing, but that is perhaps for him a safer alternative than striking out for a new freedom of self-definition.

Notes

[1] In speaking of *The Tremor of Forgery* as a parable, I am tacitly endorsing Don Adams's recent designation of the novel's genre, although as my conclusion makes clear I regard the work as a profoundly negative parable and cannot describe Howard Ingham as a "knight of faith who responds to his life traumas with an invigorated sense of existential possibility and a newfound appreciation of spiritual ideals" (2022: 97).

[2] The significance of Ingham's working title is explained as follows: "He had read somewhere, before he left America, that forgers' hands usually trembled very slightly at the beginning and end of their false signatures, sometimes so slightly the tremor could be seen only under a microscope. The tremor also expressed the ultimate crumbling of Dennison, the dual-personality, as his downfall grew imminent" (Highsmith 2011: 162). Significantly, Ingham later retitles his novel, which ends far otherwise than with its protagonist's "ultimate crumbling."

[3] The only one of Highsmith's three biographers who notes a link between Highsmith's fiction and Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist philosophy is Andrew Wilson. Revealing that she was familiar with Sartre's lecture "L'Existentialisme est un humanisme" (1945), published in English a year later, and had read his book *What Is Literature?* (1947), Wilson also implies that Highsmith was aware of the French philosopher's 1943 treatise *Being and Nothingness* (2003: 120-21). Basing his judgment primarily on a brief journal entry of 1949 by Highsmith, Don Adams says only that she was put off by "'Sartre's dreariness'" and found Søren Kierkegaard's thinking more stimulating (2022: 98).

[4] In a 1968 diary entry about her former lover Virginia Catherwood, as A. B. Emrys notes with credit to Wilson's biography (2014: 132), Highsmith wrote that "She is Lotte in *The Tremor of Forgery*—the woman whom my hero will always love, with his body, with his soul also." Emrys goes on to claim that "Lotte's physical hold over Ingham represents the choice of *jouissance* over mere *plaisir*" (93). I would submit that these constructions by both Highsmith and Emrys, given what little is revealed about Lotte in the novel itself, are unreliable.

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Narratives of Hegemony and Marginalization: Deconstructing the History Legends of India

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Abstract
Myths and legends as local sources of history reveal their implicit assumptions and demonstrate the way in which events are filtered through the interpretations of their authors. By examining a variety of these interpretations, we might piece together a refracted image of the past which will ultimately present a history of "what actually happened". There is also an attempt to create a single narrative supported by various sources that claim to reveal the truth in political and social terms about what may have happened there. I have substantiated my arguments by drawing examples from the compilation of legends, Aithihyamala (Garland of Legends)*, a pioneering and exhaustive collection of 126 legends of Kerala (India), compiled and published between 1909 and 1934 by the Sanskrit-Malayalam scholar Kottarathil Sankunni. My contention in this paper is that there is a politics behind the subversion of "other histories" (local or subaltern) to establish a hegemonic history. One finds a "politics" behind the legend-making, a deliberate attempt at compiling an elitist record of legends and through it the homogenizing of the cultural past of a region.*

Keywords: *historiography, subaltern history, rewriting history, politicizing culture, rereading legends*

Even in a democracy, history always involves power and exclusion,
for any history is someone's history,
told by that someone from a partial point of view.
(Appleby et al. 1994: 217)

If we consider history a form of shifting discourse constructed by historiographers, it is entirely possible that we need to also consider reading several accounts of the same past. This leads us to the conclusion that there can never be what may be thought of as a single, absolute and authentic account of the past. The historian at best represents the past which is a recovered past that is incomplete, fragmented and subverted. According to Keith Jenkins "the past and history float free of each other, they are ages and miles apart" (1997: 5).

A new reading is likely to appear whenever there is a change of 'gaze' or shift in perspective. As Jenkins observes, the past and history are not

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stitched into each other so that only one reading of the same past is absolutely necessary (qtd. in Appleby et al. 1994: 25*)*. While writing history, the historiographer tends to move beyond the world of facts and gives an interpretation of the past in accordance with his/her perspective. Moreover, the historian is looking at the past from the present and is, therefore, likely to be biased by the contemporary. As Jacques Le Goff writes, "all history is contemporary in so far as the past is grasped in the present and responds to the latter's interests" (1992: 130).

History today is regarded as a narrative about the past, not the past itself. The deconstructionist theorists have argued that what the historian does while narrativizing is to impose a textualized shape on the past. Poststructuralists talk about the elusive and obscure nature of the texts. A text, it has been observed, is full of gaps, uncertainties of meanings and silence. Our language is incapable of comprehending the reality and is too poor to express what we perceive. There is no one-to-one correspondence between the word and the world. There is no fixedness of meaning either.

The postmodern predicament of history, to borrow Roland Barthes' words (1975), is that the historian's description of the past reality represents a number of concepts about the past, not the past itself. It is inevitable, therefore, that while narrativizing the past, the historian ensures "the past obeys my interpretation" (Jenkins 1997: 12). By imposing plots on the past, the historian indulges in omission and exclusion and, in the process, marginalizes people, events, movements and regions from mainstream history. However, this fragmented and unequal universe of the historian has opened up the unlimited possibilities of history. It has given birth to new histories like the Feminist, the Black, the Subaltern and a host of other histories which are bold expressions of all those who have been excluded from mainstream history. History has thus given way to alternative histories making the "chorus of voices" (12) audible to the world.

Postmodern historians have realized that grand narratives can provide only an aerial view, often missing all the important details. The mainstream histories with the nation as the central unit are guilty of marginalizing and subverting regions, localities and communities. In the emerging "other" (local or subaltern) histories, the communities and the regions have become the focus of analysis. In these subaltern histories, the voices of all the dalits, the women, the peasants and other silent sections who have previously been absent in history, can be clearly heard.

It is in this context of subversion and marginalization that local histories rise into prominence. They are histories of marginalized localities, people, movements, struggles and sacrifices. By history, I mean local myths

and legends—written or oral—about the past. While some of these "histories" are formal, others are informal but they are all narrated in one form or another. Through this narrativization, we witness the process in which narrators and historiographers in the past and present have used myths and legends as political actions to create a "history" to suit their vested interests. It is the study of these histories that will help us in rereading mainstream history and looking for gaps and exclusions which will expose the politics behind this subversion.

Myths and legends or local narratives, many of which were oral, led to political responses by influencing how events were ultimately reported, recorded and translated into sources for written histories. Also, the language used in these narratives revealed some of the forces that produced them, and certainly the audience for whom they were intended. It is significant to note that these extrapolations in recorded history resulted in the marginalization of communities and their histories.

As local sources of history, myths and legends reveal their implicit assumptions and demonstrate the way in which events are filtered through the interpretations of their authors. By examining a variety of these interpretations, we might piece together a refracted image of the past which will ultimately present a history of "what actually happened". This approach is common in cultural studies, in which historians read against the mainstream texts to reveal the histories of the marginalized. Equally critical are the history of interpretations themselves, i.e., the processes through which myths and legends of the past were constructed. One comes across various issues while examining this politics of subversion. There is an attempt to create a single narrative supported by various sources that claim to reveal the truth in political and social terms about what may have happened there. There is also the problem that stems from confining oral sources that are, by nature, transient and dynamic to a more restrictive medium like the written one. Equally prominent is the difficulty of translating back and forth from several cultures and finding words that make useful associations from one language to another. There is also the necessity of interpreting events from accounts produced at different times.

It is the process of myth/legend-making that sustains the continuity of human existence and helps in transferring knowledge from one generation and one culture to another. The way sources narrate an event (in a myth or legend) brings to light the intellectual modes of understanding that have shaped different versions of history. When we identify what history makers and the compilers of legends chose and choose to tell, it

becomes clear that they provide lasting lessons of the past and the politics that influence historical memory.

According to Foucault, we need to know who produced them to evaluate the products of history. His contention is that texts immortalize their authors and connect our belief in the unchanging truth of the past to our belief in the authors who wrote about it (1980: 210). By emphasizing this unreliability of authors and the constraints of contemporary discourse on the production of knowledge, Foucault used a humbling weapon against the powers of hegemony and influenced current scholarship.

By focussing on the construction of history through local narratives or legends, I have attempted to look into these questions:

- How do narratives and legends located in sources of the past, portray the politics behind legend-making?
- Whose interests do they serve? How do legends influence historiography?
- What information do they hold other than an account of past events?
- How can they be interpreted/narrated in a postmodern literary scenario?

The answers to such questions, which are integral to what is now called postmodern scholarship, will help refigure historiography and bring out the politics behind "history-making". These questions lie at the basis of most historical narratives and shed light on the effort made to find out what happened. In a sense that is "the postmodern conundrum" as Singer puts it: "Is there any point to our intellectual endeavour if we are all trapped as Michael Foucault would claim, in the prisons of language and discourse?" (1997: 12)

My argument is that there is a politics behind the subversion of "other histories" (local or subaltern) to establish the hegemonic history through a romantic and conformist compilation and reading of myths and legends. My claims are supported by examples drawn from the historic legends of Kerala (in the southern state of India) in the compilation of legends, Aithihyamala (Garland of Legends). It is difficult to ascertain historical truths in legends the interpretation of which is decided by the language or politics of the compilers. This is true even in the case of Kottarathil Sankunni's Aithihyamala (Garland of Legends), a pioneering and exhaustive collection of the legends of Kerala, (India) compiled and published between 1909 and 1934. Sankunni is not a historian or a social

critic. However, his Aithihyamala is widely read as a social and historical document of the period.

Folklore in Kerala (India): placing *Aithihyamala* in Kerala (India) folklore

Folklore study in Kerala (India) was inaugurated in the year 1791. By that time, the Europeans had already made significant contributions to the advancement of the subject. The first work was published by Fr. Polinose in 1791 under the title *Adagiya Malabarica* which was a collection of proverbs. For half a century until the 1840s, no serious work was done in the field. In this decade, several foreigners contributed a great deal to this subject. Native scholars followed it and the emphasis was more on anthologizing and publishing rather than on any original work.

It is interesting to find out what prevented the native scholars from pursuing folklore studies before the work of Fr. Polinose. Two reasons could be traced out. Primarily, Kerala was not in the least urbanized or industrialized as it happened in the West. However, changes were brought to the social fabric of Kerala on a smaller scale through foreign contact, trade and religious conversions. Secondly, the educated people and the scholars were guided by the thought that the anthological works of folk songs and riddles deserved no serious study. Also, there was the caste and class hegemony which demarcated culture into 'higher' and 'little' traditions. As Payyanad (1999: 80) says, "We [in Kerala] too had the concept of 'higher tradition' and "little tradition" in our culture. The compartmentalization of folk arts and classical arts into 'little tradition' and 'higher tradition' respectively was prevalent at that time. The 'higher tradition' which dominated the intellectual and cultural spheres of our life never allowed the 'little tradition' to emerge from the shadows".

Perhaps it would be interesting to examine the factors that prompted foreigners to pursue folklore studies when native scholars ignored them. Firstly, they were not merely interested in popular culture or its studies but in the nature of their work. As missionaries, they wanted to be acquainted with the cultural artifacts of the peoples they worked with. As early as the 19th century, they established seminaries in Kerala and started imparting theological lessons in the vernacular. It was both a necessity and an intelligent move that resulted in learning the native language. Their devotion to their work resulted in the anthologies of proverbs, the publishing of *Keralolpathi* (Origin of Kerala) and dictionaries in the vernacular. At the same time, they did not have much regard for the folklife in Kerala and their cultural products, which the missionaries considered inferior to those of the Westerners. Their professional aim in pursuing folk

studies, therefore, was to "refine" and perfect the cultural artifacts as they considered them deficient and imperfect. Such prejudices did stand as obstacles in the path of folklore studies in Kerala.

A group of foreigners such as Edgar Thurston, William Logan and Percy Mac Queen were colonial administrators, fascinated not by India's rustic life or her village culture but rather by the stakes of the imperialists. They were part of the imperialist force that looted the country keeping it as their perpetual colony and, as it is to be expected, the ideology represented by their country was upheld by them. For instance, this is particularly evident in the maps of the Malabar Manual by Logan, the Malabar collector who displayed the important crops of Kerala, the seasons favorable for them and the exact locations where they were cultivated. The preface presents his faulty information and biased views of the people of Kerala. He says "The Malayali race has produced no historians simply because there was little or no history in one sense to record" (qtd. in Payyanad 1999: 82). In short, their colonial interests largely dictated this first phase of folklore studies started by the foreigners. It was either for religious conversion or exploitation that they were interested in learning and understanding more about the natives and their popular culture.

The first notable work by a Keralite came out in the year 1881 entitled *Bhashacharithram* (History of Malayalam Language) by P. Govinda Pillai, who studied the folksongs of Kerala. The news magazines like *Vidyavinodini* and *Viodyavilasini* gave the much-needed impetus to folklore studies. They published folksongs and descriptions of the tradition of folk arts. Then came the epoch-making compilation of legends called *Aithihyamala* by Kottarathil Sankunni, a collection of 126 stories in eight volumes, the first one published in 1909 and the last one in 1934.

From the 1930s for almost three decades, there was a great increase in the number of such anthologies along with their studies. The works of Dr. Chelanatt Achuthamenon, Dr. S. K. Nair and M. D. Raghavan are notable. The scholars concentrated on anthologizing folksongs and folk arts. Attempts were made to study folk texts through the study of various titles of folklore. Some scholars also tried to incorporate ideas from similar studies conducted outside the country and thereby bring up folklore as a separate branch of study.

By the end of the 1950s, the experts in the field started concentrating on description too, rather than confining themselves to anthologizing. By the end of the 1970s, certain descriptive studies on folksongs and folk arts also came out, written by people like Kilimanoor Vishwambharan, C. R. Kerala Varma, S. Guptan Nair, Kanhiramkulam K. Kochukrishnan Nadar, M. C.

Appunni Nambiar, Chirackal T. Balakrishnan Nair, G. Sankara Pillai, T. H. Kunhiraman Nambiar and C. M. S. Chandera. The support extended by National Book Stall, Sahitya Pravarthaka Sahakarana Sangham and government-controlled academies and institutes were of much importance. The broad outlook that pervaded all fields of knowledge influenced folklore studies in Kerala too.

The seventies brought the decline of the joint family system and the feudal structure of the society and, in turn, brought down the joint family system based on agriculture. Even when people started dreaming of a healthier way of life, they indulged in nostalgic thoughts of the past, which incidentally triggered off an added popularity and recognition to the anthologies and descriptive studies of folklore. In the first few decades of the present century, social reformers such as Sree Narayana Guru, Ayyankali and in the forties and fifties communists and agriculturist movements worked for the upliftment of the downtrodden. It was only by the end of the 1970s that the present folklore studies evolved, although many changes had been happening until then, both in attitude to the discipline and in the discipline itself. Such awareness was late to come.

In the eighties, folklorists became aware that they should pose a strong resistance to certain challenges and create awareness in the society about this. The advent of alien cultural concepts like consumerism and globalization, which interrupted the quiet life of the folks in Kerala, made folklore study all the more significant. The challenges brought by the new culture of globalization and its ideological basis posed serious problems to folklife in Kerala. A group of important personalities emerged in this discipline, as is the case of Chummar Choondal, G. Bharghavan Pillai, M. V. Vishnu Namboothiri, A. K. Nambiar and Raghavan Payyanad. Additionally, folklore academies caught up with the changes in the present age.

Folklore as an academic discipline is no longer viewed as inferior to other branches of knowledge, and yet, it has not gained the importance it deserves. The range and scope of this field of knowledge have not attained enough popularity among the public. Folklore activists themselves have not been able to comprehend the developments in the field beyond the fifties and sixties. The studies are mostly descriptive in nature and superficial which merely evokes nostalgia. The new awareness attained by certain scholars on a theoretical level and to a certain degree in practical studies has not been imbibed by the rest. The reason lies in the lack of interest or application.

However, while folklorists have reasons to counter these accusations, universities have almost sidelined, if not ignored this subject. In Kerala,

students of folklore do not pursue it at a higher level. In the West, folklore organizations coordinate folklore studies and chalk out strategies for the growth of the subject. In Kerala, however, these organizations seem to lack initiative and objectives. In addition, there is an absence of journals to publish the serious work done. Therefore, it becomes the responsibility of every folklorist to face the challenges posed by the subject and the age in which they live, by making the subject contemporary and popular.

We are passing through a highly complex, conflict-ridden era of liberalization and open market policy. The imperialist forces, which control the world market and invisibly direct the whole world, attempt to control even the life and individuality of the folks in such a way that they enhance their own policies and interests. However, as a reaction to this, a mode of restoration is gaining prominence over the world. This is reflected in the domains of knowledge in the entire world. Truth and knowledge which had been marginalized in the premodern and modern era have come into prominence because of this. This is evident from the fact that local history and narratives have become significant in historical studies, local culture in cultural studies and marginalized literature in literary studies. A study of the politics and power, which dominate and control history and legend-making, becomes significant in this context.

Reading through the gaps in the legends of Kerala (India) – text, context and (re)interpretation

Though some regard them as a figment of the imagination or blatant lies, legends have always had a place in the socio-political life of people. Legends are part of the oral tradition transferred from generation to generation. Their making has always been a part of cultures across the world. Legends have played no mean role in creating the "history" of a region. By drawing examples from actual places, the creators have succeeded in skillfully convincing the reader of the existence of an "imagined community". Kottarathil Sankunni is no different. It is through his compilation of legends, *Aithihyamala,* that the people of Kerala seem to have become aware of the history of temples, the regions and the life histories of rulers and the ruling class. "It is left to us", says Ambalapuzha Ramavarma "to sift and sieve the legends to look for the truth through logic and research. However, it is commendable, that *Aithihyamala* has been able to give us a memorable history although shrouded in untruth and vagueness" (Sankunni 1909, *Prologue*).

Sankunni portrayed people from all walks of life: kings, lords, priests, physicians, poets, brigands and sorcerers. Yet, we cannot say that he

gave a secularised image of Kerala life and society. It is true that there are legends about people from marginalized communities and Sankunni also attempted a rereading/rewriting of some of the legends from the oral tradition. For instance, the legend of a Muslim brigand like *Kayamkulam Kochunni* (Sakunni 1909: 176-201), a Kerala version of Robin Hood, seen by many to be a heartless dacoit, is described by Sankunni as actually honest and compassionate. *Arakkal Beevi* (845-849) is presented as a Hindu princess who embraced Islam to respect tradition and started a new dynasty in order to resolve a crisis with justice, courage and tolerance. The story of the Christian priest of *Kadamattam* (428-441) speaks of a destitute lad becoming a priest who heals and has power over evil spirits. Sankunni also has questions which he sometimes poses at the end of his legends. However, he leaves these questions open-ended and, in his own words, "to be solved by the scholarly who can examine these questions logically, the result of which will be a boon to all". Sankunni is passionate in his narration. It is as if he wanted us to believe what he believes in and, therefore, one finds a fanatic adherence to the subjects he handled. His ignoring the contradictions in his writing has led his stories to be appropriated by the upper caste Hindus as a treatise on temple history and history of the elite and upper-caste families. Others who fail to read through the gaps in Sankunni's *Aithihyamala* regard it as children's literature.

There has been an attempt to compile the "popular legends" in order to establish a hegemonic history and in the process, what happens is a deliberate marginalization of communities and denigration of their "histories". One can also find an overdose of Sanskrit slokas in almost all the stories, which is yet another example of elitist documentation of the life and society of Kerala. So the *namboothiri* (upper caste) history becomes a homogenized cultural past of Kerala. Sankunni does not touch upon the social inequalities of the period, considering that most of his stories belonged to the feudal period (16th -17th centuries) and the British colonial period (18th-19th centuries). For instance, in Sankunni's *Kadamattathu Kathanar*, there is just a passing mention of a visitor from the European church who did not approve of Kathanar's magic and healing. Sankunni fails to read in this legend an attempt of the European Catholic Church to hegemonise its faith over the marginalized cultures in the colonised lands. *Arakkal Beevi*'s story is a conformist narrative where she decides to uphold tradition and sanctity by moving out of her home and finally marrying the Muslim young man with the permission of the custodians of the Hindu religion, namely the priestly brahmin class. Munroe, the British resident and Dewan who has faith in Lord Padmanabha and wants to protect the Hindu king (Sankunni 1909: 241)

is again a conformist reading of Sankunni about the British colonial magnanimity with the divine validation of a Hindu god. There are passing references to *Tipu's (King of Mysore) Malabar attack* (461, 825) but nothing into the actual historical anecdotes of atrocities. Also, one does not find any legends about the resistance to colonialism, feudal struggle or the movements against the hegemony of upper caste and class.

Numerous myths, especially creation myths, have gained the stature of legends with some historical facts, dates, events and even places or regions attributed to them. This is true even among Indian legends. Importantly, almost all such legends were created to the best interest of religions, castes, communities or ideologies. Many legends find their place even in school textbooks as though they were history. According to this legend, the land of Kerala was a gift from the Arabian Sea to Parasurama, one of the ten avatars or incarnations of Lord Vishnu. The legend has it that Parasurama threw his *parasu* (axe) across the sea from Gokarnam to Kanyakumari (or from Kanyakumari to Gokarnam as per another version), and the water receded up to the spot where it fell. The tract of territory so thrown up is said to have constituted the land of Kerala, otherwise called Bhargavakshetram or Parasuramakshetram. A mythological hero himself, there is very little historical or factual basis for the Parasurama tradition. According to the legend, the Lord bequeathed this precious land to 64 families. Under its shade, the incoming Vedic Brahmins claimed that Kerala was their inheritance by divine dispensation (Menon 1979: 9). With their cleverness and means at their disposal, the Malayalee Brahmins convinced the locals that they alone possessed genuine knowledge as different from that of the Buddhist *theros* (priests) and as such they were Nampoothiris or *nampu* (reliable) theros. By tradition and habit, the locals were tolerant, understanding, and prone to be fascinated by novelty. They welcomed the new sect and lent their ears to their philosophy. With ploy and subtle manipulation, they took over the places of worship and abodes of knowledge, along with the extensive freeholds they had. Naturally, the Aryan intruders became the *janmis* (landlords). They annexed a small segment of the Dravidian population as their allies and henchmen and labelled them *savarnas* (upper caste). A warrior group was organized as their military sentries. The existent priestly sector was transformed into various temple functionaries and some of the local chieftains who wielded considerable clout were acknowledged as *kshatriyas* (royal class). Thus, the four-fold Hindu caste syndrome came into being. The rest of the people from the vast majority were denigrated as *avarna* (low caste) with the stigma of

untouchability upon them. Thus, was introduced the nefarious caste divide into the egalitarian society of ancient Kerala.

The politics of legend-making: rereading a popular legend

The intricacies of the complex social order in Kerala can be traced to the legend from popular folklore entitled '*Parayi Pettu Panthirukulam*' (twelve kulams/clans born of a paraya woman belonging to a marginalized class), the fascinating story of Vararuchi, a renowned brahmin scholar and subject at the court of King Vikramaadithya (believed to have lived around 300 A.D.). Highly learned in all the *saasthras* (sciences), he is said to have discovered the inter-relationship between numbers and the letters of the alphabet. The legend compiled and narrated in the Kottarathil Sankunni's *Aithihyamala* (Garland of Legends) is as follows:

> *One day, King Vikramadithya, prompted by those jealous of the King's admiration for Vararuchi, asked him to recite the most important verse, (and in it, the most important phrase) from the epic Ramayana. Vararuchi could not immediately come up with a proper answer and the King gave him 41 days to find out. Vararuchi approached many scholars but still could not arrive at the right answer. Dejected, he left for the forest and on the night of the 40th day, as he was resting under a banyan tree, Vararuchi finally got the answer from the conversation of two spirits who were seated on the branches of the tree in the form of kalaneemi birds. The most important verse in Ramayana was the advice given by Sumithra to her son Lakshman before he embarked on a 14-year life in exile with his elder brother and hero of the epic, Sri Ram and his wife Sita. "Ramam Dasaratham vidhhi, maam vidhhi Janakaatmajam Ayodhya mataveem vidhhi, gaccha thaatha yattha sukham" (consider Rama as your father Dasaratha, Sita as your mother and the forest as Ayodhya; may the journey be a blessed one).*
>
> *And the most important phrase in it was "Maam vidhi Janakaatmajam" (consider Sita as your mother). Vararuchi got his answer. But he also gathered from the conversation of the birds that he was destined to marry a girl born that day in a nearby lower caste paraya family. He returned to the court and the King was much pleased at Vararuchi's answer. The brahmin scholar then willfully used this opportunity to avoid the prospect of marrying a paraya woman and convinced the King to order the killing of the girl child born on that day in a paraya family which Vararuchi said was necessary for the wellbeing of the country. The girl child instead of being killed was abandoned on a small raft in the flowing river with a lighted torch stuck on her head.*
>
> *Several years later, Vararuchi, during one of his travels, went into a poor brahmin's house for food. Vararuchi set some preconditions (in riddles) for taking food there. He said that he needed "a fine silk cloth to wear after my bath, a hundred people must be fed before I eat, a hundred items must be served for my meal. When I finish, I need to eat three people. And four people must support me afterwards".*

However, he was assured by a girl from inside that all the conditions will be met. She knew that the fine silk cloth means a konakam (inner wear) of fine material. Giving a hundred people food means performing the vaishya ritual, which is equivalent to making a hundred gods happy. A puli inji curry (ginger-curd curry/ginger pickle) is equal to a hundred items, and that is all he needs for his meal. The three people he wants to eat are betel leaves, areca nut and lime-paste. And the four people he needs to support him are the four legs of the cot on which he wishes to lie down after his meal is over

Impressed by the intelligence of the girl who could understand even the complicated conditions he had put forth and the perfect arrangements she made for him, Vararuchi married her. He later realized that the girl he married was the same girl who was sent afloat on the river. The great scholar could not escape his destiny. The brahmin family where he spent the night had found the girl floating in the river and had brought her up. Vararuchi then set on a pilgrimage with his wife. The pilgrimage seemed never ending, and the woman gave birth to twelve children during this journey, while traveling along the banks of river Nila. Vararuchi asked his wife after each delivery, whether the newborn had a mouth or not. On getting an answer in the affirmative, Vararuchi mercilessly asked his wife to leave the child on the wayside and proceed. His justification was that if the child had a mouth, then God would feed him.

Grief-stricken by her husband's actions, when the 12th child was born, she lied and said the baby did not have a mouth, upon which he permitted her to take the child along. But when she was about to breastfeed it, the mouth was actually not there, proving that the words of great personalities do indeed become real. Vararuchi then deified the child on a hill, which is called Vaayillaakkunnilappan (Hill Lord without mouth), near Kadampazhipuram (in the present Palakkad district).

Translated from Aithihyamala (Sankunni 1909: 44)

It is said that families belonging to different communities of Kerala, from brahmins to parayas, brought each abandoned child up. All the children became famous and were revered by the people because of their knowledge and spiritual abilities. They also recognized each other as they grew up. It is said that they used to get together at the illam (residence) of the eldest son, Mezhathol Agnihothri, on their father Vararuchi's Sraadham (death anniversary). These twelve children are believed to be: Mezhathol Agnihothri (brahmin), Paakkanaar (paraya, a low caste), Rajakan (washer man), Naaraanathu Bhraanthan (elayathu, a brahmin of lower strata), Kaarakkal Maatha (a woman of high caste nair), Akavoor Chaathan (vysya/farmer), Vaduthala Nair (nair/soldier), Vallon (pulaya/lower caste), Uppukottan (Muslim), Paananaar (paanan, low caste of nomadic country musicians), Perumthachan (carpenter) and Vaayillaakkunnilappan (deity). The descendants of these famous children consider themselves relatives, despite the vast social and economic gap between them. The

veracity of this legend may be difficult to judge. The legend attempts to endorse the belief that the descendants of these clans are amicable just as the twelve children mentioned in the legend who used to meet up every year to honour their parents. This narrative not only makes the legend unique but far-fetched in the false egalitarian perspective it seems to perpetuate, far removed from the actual social ills of the times which had a regressive caste and social hierarchy.

Until the coming of the Aryans, who established their cultural supremacy in India, there had been no caste system (Edamarukku 1995: 456). Distinctions were based on traditional jobs. The ones who cultivated the *pulam* (fields) were *pulayas*, and the ones who grazed the sheep were shepherds and so on. Then came the Jains and the Buddhists. The patrons of the caste system could not keep up with these faiths. During the time of feud/clashes between the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas, the caste system was not strong. It was when they got into a compromise that the caste system became deep-rooted. It was considered the duty of the brahmins to salute the Kshatriyas as the class destined to rule the land and they, in turn, would be regarded as those who would ensure salvation for them. So, with the help of the kings, they could eliminate the Buddhist faith and popularize the caste system. The brahmin invaders considered the feudal lords as belonging to one class. The merchants were below them and all the others were even lower in the social hierarchy. This is how the caste system became entrenched in Kerala although it was not as distinct in terms of the structured caste hierarchy as in North India.

Over time, mass awakening and the consequent attitudinal change that has crystallized among a large section of Kerala's population on different issues have opened up diverse themes and new avenues in historiography. Sumit Sarkar (1983: 52) also talks about a quick transition from social reform, initially sought through caste associations, to thoroughgoing radicalism with the swing towards communism as a recurrent feature of Kerala life. The awakening of the subaltern class, ezhavas under the social reformer Sri Narayana Guru was a major anti-brahmin movement and a step towards social awakening. Sri Ayyankali, the foremost dalit activist and social reformer in colonial Kerala challenged the upper caste restrictions on the marginalized communities in education, public space and social interactions. This has given rise to a subaltern approach towards Kerala history like P. K. Balakrishnan's *Jathivyavysthayaum Kerala Charithravum* (Caste Structure and Kerala History) and Edamarukku *T. C. Joseph's Kerala Samskaram* (Culture of Kerala). It was realized that what was hawked as Kerala history until recently was a mixture

of myths and legends, which were fabricated by the dominant forces of the feudal period to give legitimacy to the casteist order that was established possibly a thousand years ago.

Conclusion

In his book, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson says that the nation [here, a region] is imagined as a community because regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation prevalent in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship (1991: 6). In the legend-making process, Sankunni created an "imagined community", to borrow the term from Benedict Anderson, where he tried to give an account of the history of the period in a homogenized framework, regardless of the actual hegemony and inequality that existed then. Therefore, the Kerala legends can be read in this light where a conscious attempt can be traced out in constructing an "imagined history" of the dominant classes/castes (even resorting to a divine validation as in the mythological references) to subvert the local history/legends of the other communities.

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FULBRIGHT CORNER

Collaboratively Investigating How to Teach Information Literacy to K-14 Students in Bulgaria

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Abstract
This article documents recommendations for teaching information literacy at the K-14 educational level in Bulgaria. Over the span of five focus groups (a qualitative research method), professional librarians, teachers, university professors and NGO leaders met to discuss the information literacy landscape in Bulgaria, current best practices in how to teach information literacy and suggestions for future changes in the educational system, including the creation of a national framework for information literacy. Through the use of qualitative methods, this research highlights the voices and expertise of local educators and civil society members, seeking to gain an in-depth understanding of the educational and information literacy contexts present in contemporary Bulgaria. Moreover, this article also reflects upon the relationship between information literacy, intercultural education and intercultural dialog, using the Bulgarian focus group as a case study.

Keywords: *information literacy, Bulgaria, intercultural education*

Most young people around the world today are connected to the Internet. However, simply being connected to the Internet does not automatically make one information literate. Julien (2005: 210) writes, "Information overload, misinformation, and complex information retrieval systems, in addition to people's natural inclination to be satisfied with conveniently accessible information, regardless of its accuracy or reliability, combine to challenge most claims of competence in information skills." According to the American Library Association, "Information literacy is a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information."

From March to August 2022, I met with information literacy stakeholders in the field of K-14 education in Bulgaria through the award of a Fulbright Bulgaria-Romania Joint Research Award. The aim of my grant was to investigate how information literacy is being taught in both countries

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in a K-14 setting from the perspective of local stakeholders (i.e. teachers, university professors, school, public and university librarians and local NGO leaders). K-14 is an American term defined as educational instruction from kindergarten until twelfth grade plus two additional years of post-secondary instruction. Both the premise set forth above by Julien (2005: 210) and the definition of information literacy from the American Library Association, shaped the primary direction of my research. This article will focus mainly on the research methodology and findings from the Bulgarian half of my grant, which will be subsequently explored in greater depth.

In Bulgaria, I organized a focus group consisting of six information literacy stakeholders, including two university librarians, two secondary school English teachers, one university professor of library science and one member of a local NGO that worked frequently with underserved youth. Focus group participants were found by putting out a call by email through a faculty member of Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, which was my host institution during my grant and through the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission, which administered my grant and has a large professional network in the country. Six candidates responded favourably to the call that also could agree to the time commitment of five focus group meetings that lasted around two hours each time. Applicants needed to work in some capacity with youth in the county and have a general interest in teaching information literacy skills. Participants worked in Sofia, Blagoevgrad, Mezdra and Gorna Oryahovitsa. This presented a mixture of urban, mid-size and small towns.

As in Romania, focus groups were the main research methodology I chose to investigate how information literacy is being taught in Bulgaria. Focus groups are a type of qualitative research method that centres on the communication between research participants to create data. According to Kitzinger (1995: 299), "Although group interviews are often used simply as a quick and convenient way to collect data from several people simultaneously, focus groups explicitly use group interaction as part of the method. This means that instead of the researcher asking each person to respond to a question in turn, people are encouraged to talk to one another: asking questions, exchanging anecdotes and commenting on each other's experiences and points of view."

I explicitly chose the methodology of focus groups in order to get a cross-section of viewpoints regarding how information literacy is being taught in Bulgaria from different stakeholders from multiple regions in the country. I also intentionally kept my general research question open-ended in order to let the local stakeholders guide the focus group discussions.

Before each focus group I sent a list in advance of about 8-10 questions to the participants. After the first meeting, I would revisit my notes from the previous discussions. Then, I would create new questions based on the past ideas that had come up in the other sessions. As the moderator of the focus group discussions, I wanted to provide structure for the participants, but also allow them to be the primary guides for our conversations.

This is because I believe that in social science research, local stakeholders should work collaboratively with researchers to help identify problems, solutions and best practices to real-world topics and issues that are present in their own countries. Outsiders can take an active interest in these issues and questions but must work in tandem with local professionals in order to provide recommendations that will have any lasting success. Thambinathan and Kinsella (2021: 3) write, "Exercising critical reflexivity is a key approach to decolonizing research. Critical reflectivity is powerful for examining researchers' epistemological assumptions, their situatedness with respect to the research, and crucial in addressing power dynamics in research." Although Bulgaria is a European country, it is still a nation that is not well known to most foreigners and I strongly believe that any recommendations that come from my research should be based on the experiences of local stakeholders to ensure any form of lasting change. This conscious decision to use focus groups for this research is an active exercise in critical reflexivity concerning the epistemological position and methodological framework for this research project.

The focus group meetings were recorded with the consent of the participants and the analysis of the meetings was done using the method of emergent coding. Stuckey (2015: 8) writes, "One of the keys in coding your data, and in conducting a qualitative analysis more generally, is developing a storyline." She goes onto state that codes can be emergent, meaning that they were concepts, actions, or meanings, that evolved from the data. From this coding process, five main concepts emerged that are subsequently explored.

Firstly, young students today are digital natives but they need guidance and instruction in information literacy. Being information literate requires a different set of skills than being able to use social media or to do a simple search on Google. Becker (2018: 2) writes, "The term digital natives is a categorization of a person born or brought up during the age of digital technology. In many ways this leads them to be familiar with computers and the Internet from an early age. The problem is that being familiar and being literate are not necessarily the same thing." This statement was echoed in the focus group meetings multiple times. Having students who are digital

natives in the classroom gives students the potential to be interested and competent in information literacy. However, they must be taught these skills as part of a curriculum. It should not be assumed that they automatically have the proficiencies to determine when information is needed, where to locate it, how to evaluate it or how to use it effectively, simply because they feel comfortable using technology for other tasks.

Secondly, educational stakeholders in Bulgaria need an online hub where they can collaborate to share trainings and materials for teaching about information literacy in the Bulgarian language. The focus group determined that no such universal platform at this time exists to accomplish this goal. Most of the materials created by organizations (such as UNESCO for example) to teach about information literacy are only available in major world languages. Bulgarian teachers or students who do not have a high proficiency level in another language are often left out from having access to high-quality materials for learning about information literacy strategies. This is simply due to this lack of materials available in their mother tongue.

Thirdly, the focus group meetings determined that information literacy is an integral part of the learning process. Warmkessel and McCade (1997: 80) write, "Librarians and other educators have written extensively about the need to promote information literacy as an integral part of the education process. The basic goal of information literacy is to enable people to become lifelong learners. The premise for this goal is that information literate individuals will be able to sift through the enormous amount of information available, effectively using appropriate sources to solve problems and make decisions in all areas of their lives."

As Warmkessel and McCade express, this idea was not particularly new even at the time of their article's publication in 1997. However, it bears repeating, since many countries still have not sufficiently invested in developing or funding curriculums that support teaching about information literacy. It was the focus group's consensus that students would do better in their studies across the board, if they had more instruction in information literacy. A clear example that highlights this is the issue of plagiarism. If more students knew where to search for information, how to paraphrase the information and then properly cite it, it is probable that less students would submit plagiarized work. Some students will always plagiarize out of laziness. However, the focus group members cited multiple circumstances where they also saw students plagiarize because they lacked the proper skillset to do research or to summarize and cite information correctly.

Fourthly, short and efficient information literacy trainings are needed for Bulgarian teachers. This point was particularly underlined by the

secondary teachers in the focus group. Many teachers in Bulgaria do not have access to trainings on how to teach their students about information literacy. However, these trainings must be truly worth the teachers' time and cannot simply add more busy work to the teachers' plates. They need a program that is efficient and targeted for them to be able to directly use in their classrooms to build upon the general national curriculum that is already in place.

Fifthly, civic engagement is connected to information literacy. This is the final theme that was determined by the focus group. Correia (2002: 15) writes, "Information literate citizens know how to use information to their best advantage, both at work and in everyday life. They identify the most useful information when making decisions when voting or to participate in community life." The focus group concluded that it is in Bulgarian society's best interest (as it is in all countries) to invest in and promote teaching about information literacy on a standardized, national scale with a clear framework. This would be of great long-term benefit to not only students and teachers, but to society as a whole.

In summary, regarding the focus group, these meetings provided a snapshot of the current information literacy landscape in Bulgaria as seen by a variety of different stakeholders in education and civil society. The findings and proposals regarding improving teaching information literacy are straightforward and common sense. There are even experts on information literacy who already live in Bulgaria and have the professional background to implement most of these changes. What is needed moving forward is commitment and funding from an entity such as the Ministry of Education, a large NGO or UNESCO, etc. to make these suggestions a reality.

Bulgaria would strongly benefit from having a common framework for teaching information literacy, an online hub where educators and civil society members could learn about and share strategies and materials for teaching about information literacy in the Bulgarian language and teachers need to have access to short and effective trainings for teaching about information literacy that fit into the busy curriculum and schedules that have been already set for them. All of these goals are practical and realistic, but require the proper support and funding. However, the potential benefits to Bulgarian society are immeasurable and the topic merits a deeper exploration to be undertaken by a large entity with the resources to implement a wide-scale program for teaching about information literacy in the country.

Of equal significance is the space for reflection that this research grant and project provided me regarding the relationship between

information literacy, intercultural dialog and intercultural education. Neuner (2012: 29) states, "As long as we stay in our own world, what we experience and know about its objects, its underlying values, about attitudes and sets of behaviour seems 'normal' to us." As a trained teacher and school librarian, I believe it is imperative that we reach across borders to work together and better understand similar issues that are facing students, teachers, librarians and societies today. How information literacy is being taught (or in some cases not being taught) is arguably one of the greatest questions in education for this decade with the rise of social media use, misinformation and disinformation. The Bulgarian focus group is an example of how using concepts from intercultural education and intercultural dialog can create productive and rich conditions for exploring global issues from the viewpoints of multiple stakeholders with different cultures and backgrounds.

Młynarczuk-Sokołowska (2013: 139) writes, "The paradigm of coexistence constitutes the basis for intercultural education. It also determines its main goal, which is to prepare society for living in the post-modern world, where diversity is inherent." Intercultural education does not value any culture more than another. In the same vein, I have sought to create a research project to investigate how information literacy is taught in Bulgaria that does not simply impose American teaching and library standards on the Bulgarian educational system. Rather, the focus group was a collaborative effort to look at what are the information and educational landscapes of Bulgaria, what are the needs of local stakeholders and students and how can possibly taking some practices from different countries be adapted to truly meet the needs of Bulgarian students and educators. The epistemological positions and methodological approaches to this research created an ample space for Bulgarian stakeholders to present their views, experiences and reflections on improving teaching about information literacy in their own country in conjunction with approaches and ideas that we examined from the U.S. and other countries.

Kotilainen and Suoninen (2013: 141) write, "Media and information literacies are regarded worldwide as core skills of active citizenship. The challenges seem to be in creating local versions of the global declarations and learning materials, which mostly present the ideal situation." Guided by the principles of intercultural education, our focus group discussions were nuanced and accommodated a multitude of viewpoints instead of searching for one-size-fits-all recommendations. This embrace of an intercultural education approach helped us achieve the first part of a larger project that should be carried out in Bulgaria that respects Kotilainen and Suoninen's

recommendation of "creating local versions of the global declarations and learning materials" for information literacy.

In addition to intercultural education, intercultural dialog also has an important overlap with information literacy and this research project. According to Grizzle, Torrent and Manuel Pérez Tornero (2013: 11):

> The media and other information providers, including those on the Internet, influence the view that a society has of itself and of others. They also represent a communication bridge between communities and groups, especially with the spread of ICT [information and communication technology]. Therefore, they can contribute to generating conflicts and vilifying differences or, to the contrary, to bringing about dialogue, understanding and respect for differences. If citizens improve their media and information competency, they can contribute to representing a serious demand for the mass media and other information providers to operate in accordance with peace and harmonious international relations.

One of the outcomes of the focus group was creating meaningful dialog and potential change regarding teaching about information literacy in Bulgaria through having discussions and examining resources from various points of view. As an extension of this, it was also an aim that the focus group would have a multiplier effect, meaning colleagues of the participants or different local stakeholders might be inspired to work collaboratively across borders and cultures to also find their own potential solutions to problems related to teaching about information literacy or different questions in education. Holmes (2014: 1) states:

> The term 'intercultural dialogue' is now in wide currency and offers much hope to peace and harmony among nations. Officially inaugurated in 2008, via the Council of Europe's White Paper and promulgated by the European Union's declaration in the same year, the concept suggests a social and political response to the need for intercultural communication and understanding in what was then a rapidly expanding European Union.

As the focus group shows, intercultural dialog however, does not only need to be carried out on a large scale, but can also be conducted on a smaller level. Plenty of small mobility exchanges and structured person-to-person interactions of people from different cultures can countries can be equally as valuable as large events in promoting intercultural dialog. Ruffino (2012: 83) writes:

> Living in another environment helps participants to recognise that the world is one large community, a global island, in which certain problems are shared by everyone everywhere. They become able to empathise with their hosts' perspective on some of these problems and to appreciate that workable solutions must be culturally sensitive and not merely technologically feasible. Such awareness prepares them to understand the crises facing humankind.

In conclusion, this research grant and project cemented my belief in the power of intercultural education and intercultural dialog. When structured correctly, opportunities that allow ordinary people to communicate, interact and exchange ideas across borders can assist them in finding potential solutions to shared problems. This research project took place from March-August 2022 in the form of a focus group consisting of six information literacy stakeholders in Bulgaria. The qualitative method of focus groups was chosen as the methodology for this research. This was intended to highlight the voices and expertise of local educators and civil society members from within Bulgaria, concerning questions surrounding teaching about information literacy in the country. The structure of the data collection and the reflection on the findings was collaborative and guided by principles of intercultural education and intercultural dialog, so as to not place more value on the views of individuals or organizations from one culture above another.

To recapitulate, the key recommendations from the focus group consist of: the need for a common framework for teaching about information literacy in the country, an online hub where educators and civil society members could learn about and share strategies and materials for teaching information literacy in the Bulgarian language and teachers need to have access to short and effective training for teaching about information literacy that fit into the busy curriculum and schedules that already exist. As previously documented by Grizzle, Torrent and Manuel Pérez Tornero (2013: 11), a large benefit of being competent in information literacy skills is that it can directly contribute to dialog, understanding and respect across cultures. Furthermore, another extension from the focus group, although not a direct finding, is again the power of ordinary people to also use intercultural education and intercultural dialog as meaningful tools to work towards finding solutions to complex problems in the fields of information literacy and education. In today's political climate, this takeaway seems especially meaningful and relevant.

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