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Contents

To Improve or Not to Improve: Liminal Iterations of the Self in T.S. Eliot's 'Prufrock'

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Abstract

T.S. Eliot's 1915 poem 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' repeatedly registers the need to self-optimize in response to provocations. Yet, the narrator is never able to respond to them in a way that would either improve his personal standing or bring him favorable social recognition. As he never denies the need to improve, the inability transitions into disinterest in the question of improvement itself. This essay argues that the narrator's (in)ability to support or oppose self-optimization in 'Prufrock' indicates a liminal position with respect to the problem, a position in which the self is impassive, indifferent, and perhaps even bored. However, even as this configuration of (in)capacity leading to disinterest is repeatedly brought forth in the poem, it cannot be taken to be ineffectual and pointless. Rather, the apparently endless iteration of the arrangement brings about new possibilities for the imagination of the self—possibilities of the self's co-existence with contingencies of time, space, and expression.

Keywords: self-improvement, liminality, iterations, possibilities, contingency

The present essay takes a critical view of the relationship between self-optimization and modernist literature and culture. With specific regard to T.S. Eliot's well-known poem 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' (1915, hereafter referred to as 'Prufrock'), it argues that modernist literature need not always be understood as taking an easily discernible position of support or opposition vis-à-vis the question of self-improvement and optimization. Instead, it suggests that the narrative of Eliot's poem comes to repeatedly indicate indifference and disinterest towards the problem.[1] The speaker's persistent impassive attitude therein entails him acquiring a liminal position, a position that nonetheless remains powerful as it brings about new possibilities of imagination and expression.[2] This suggestion is based on a careful perusal of the writings of Jacques Derrida who asserts that iterability in literature is not a mechanical repetition of the same but that which inscribes newness in the wake of its occurrence through *différance* and necessarily insufficient supplementation.

Accordingly, the paper has been divided into two sections. The first segment establishes, through a recourse to work by the Australian writer David Malouf, that humans have always been restless—restless to improve their lot in the world and achieve happiness. In the early twentieth century, as suggested by the sociologist and thinker Georg Simmel, this restlessness to get better could be said to transform into efforts by individuals in urban societies to participate only in discourse governed by logic, calculation, and money. The second part of the present essay close-reads sections from 'Prufrock' in the light of the discussion in the opening

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1   Alongside 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' (1911), 'Prufrock' is perhaps the representative poem in the early phase of Eliot's oeuvre. As Jewel Spears Brooker underlines, the poet's oeuvre can be divided into three parts which reflect three distinct attitudes towards metanarratives such as religion, spiritualism, and, as a corollary, self-improvement. The first stage is marked by disjunction, the second—whose signature achievements are 'Sweeney Among the Nightingales' (1918) and 'The Wasteland' (1922)—by ambivalence, and the final one by transcendence whose most substantial statement is found in the 1925 poem 'The Hollow Men' (Brooker 2018: 3-4).

2   The impassive orientation of the speaker of 'Prufrock' makes him one among several central presences or protagonists of modernist literature who are disinclined towards action and activity. The eponymous protagonist of Herman Melville's "Bartleby, The Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street" (1856), for example, suddenly refuses to examine a document at the lawyer's firm in which he is employed. Slowly, he refuses to undertake even the most basic tasks including eating and finding a proper place to live. Similarly, Ernst Junger's novel *Eumeswil* (published in 1977, almost five decades after it was written) features the historian Manuel Venator, modelled on the idealized figure of the Anarch. The Anarch is an individual who lives peacefully and dispassionately without participating in any socio-cultural activity. In the novel, Venator thus tries to make a refuge for himself among the mountains as he feels that the space would allow him to realize complete freedom and self-sufficiency. Even K., the protagonist of Franz Kafka's *The Castle* (1926), refuses to leave the scene and return to his temporary quarters at the village-school though he realizes that he would not be able to meet Klamm, the authoritative official. For a detailed analysis of K.'s refusal to leave the scene and opting to wait, apparently pointlessly, see *[Author]*.

section to argue that the poem's speaker repeatedly indicates disinterest towards self-optimization and improvement. This section of the paper demonstrates that the iteration of such a liminal position entails a significant re-imagination of contingencies of time and space, in line with arguments by Derrida.

I

In the long essay 'The Happy Life: The Search for Contentment in the Modern World' (2011), David Malouf attempts a synoptic account of how happiness has been conceived and perceived by human beings throughout the ages. Some readers may rightly feel that it is counter-intuitive to begin the present essay on Eliot's 'Prufrock' with a reference to this piece by Malouf. Yet, Malouf's essay is relevant for a discussion of self-optimization in literature and culture as happiness is often understood to be the goal, the end that the human being supposedly achieves once he or she improves and makes progress. Malouf's story of happiness among humans has three key milestones—two unusual narratives about the origins of human life and society and a late eighteenth-century historical sketch by the Frenchman Marie Jean Antoine Nicolas de Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet. In the first tale of human origins, Malouf considers Plato's eponymous dialogue involving the Sophist Protagoras. Protagoras tells the story of the genesis of human, animal, and plant life on the planet. He states that Zeus, the father of the gods, passes the job of creation to the Titan Prometheus who, in turn, passes it to his twin-brother Epimetheus. Dutifully, Epimetheus distributes special qualities like fur, feather, and thick hide among all creatures that would protect them from the elements. To ensure their survival amidst their inevitable struggle amongst each other, he provides some with poisonous fangs, some with sharp claws, and some with the power to fly. Moreover, he is careful to compensate for the great size of some creatures with the slowness of their movement and he even makes some animals plant-eaters only. At the conclusion of the exercise, as Epimetheus wants to inform his brother, he realizes that he has forgotten to provide man with anything, neither clothing, nor any source of food or living spaces.

    In the dialogue, Protagoras states that Prometheus then comes to the rescue as he suggests that man must fend for himself—what the gods have provided to other creatures, he must find on his own. As Malouf argues, this creation myth in the dialogue thus sets man in a heroic light. It establishes man as the maker of his own destiny, as a self-sufficient and autonomous creature of his own nature, history, and fate. Yet, as Malouf underlines, underneath man's heroism lies unrest or restlessness—a significant aspect that would make man always curious to know and have more, be dissatisfied with whatever he would achieve, and be insecure

about his accomplishments. Restlessness or unrest, in other words, goes hand in hand with material comfort and happiness that man seeks for himself—he would always optimize and improve his socio-economic position but never feel that he has done enough (Malouf 2011: 16-19).

The second myth of origins that Malouf discusses in the essay is the Judeo-Christian one, one that is figured in George Herbert's poem 'The Pulley' (1633). In this poem, like the Epimetheus story, man is ordained with everything but remains devoid of any rest. God provides him with all the riches of the world but makes him suffer interminable dissatisfaction and restlessness till he meets death. In this regard, the role of the central conceit of the poem that also gives it its title is worth considering. The pulley creates force and leverage—a contrast to the rest that God does not give to man. Interestingly, it is also what connects man to God as the latter uses rest as leverage to pull the former closer.

> When God at first made man,
> Having a glass of blessings standing by;
> "Let us" (said he) "pour on him all we can:
> Let the world's riches, which dispersed lie,
> Contract into a span."
>
> So strength first made a way;
> Then beauty flowed, then wisdom, honor, pleasure:
> When almost all was out, God made a stay,
> Perceiving that alone all of his treasure
> Rest in the bottom lay.
>
> "For if I should" (said he)
> "Bestow this jewel also on my creature,
> He would adore my gifts instead of me,
> And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature:
> So both should losers be.
>
> "Yet let him keep the rest,
> But keep them with repining restlessness:
> Let him be rich and weary, that at least,
> If goodness lead him not, yet weariness
> May toss him to my breast." (Malouf 2011: 19-20)

Condorcet's treatise *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* (1795) challenges the traditional and ecclesiastically authorized version of history that conceives of time gone before as a storehouse of exempla. It argues that the reality which humans inhabit is not composed of people, events, and movements

which are mere repetitions of those in the past. Instead, as Malouf underlines, the treatise is invested in the idea of progress—progress of man encompassing nine stages from the nomadic hordes of pre-history to early industrialization concomitant with the French Revolution of 1789. Man's journey on the planet, in other words, has been a tale of advancement and improvement according to Condorcet and the journey cannot come to an end for man must always invest in making the future for himself as well as succeeding generations. As pointed out by Malouf, Condorcet's message of working hard in the present to make the future without any regard for what may have happened in the past continued to hold sway till at least the close of the nineteenth century. Malouf suggests that the writings of Anton Chekhov provide ample testimony to the phenomenon for the latter's characters like Astrov in *Uncle Vanya* (1898) and Vershinin in *The Three Sisters* (1901) repeatedly wonder if the generations that will inhabit Russia after them would recognize and remember their hard work (Malouf 2011: 24-26).

In his essay, Malouf rightly underscores the vision of man's destiny that the Epimetheus story, Herbert's poem, and Condorcet's treatise share. For the three of them, man is self-driven and there are no limits to what he may achieve. In fact, the essential requirements of discovery, invention, improvement, and optimization are what make him man. If and when he achieves ends to all these drives, he may be (finally) happy. Yet, even in Condorcet's historical sketch, the shadow of unrest always creeps behind man. To achieve the purported happiness and perfection, he cannot and must not rest. In Malouf's words, "It is no coincidence that Condorcet's exact contemporary was Goethe. There is something Faustian in this new, this 'modern' version of Man as both the happy child of progress, of the will to knowledge and power, and its endlessly unresting slave" (Malouf 2011: 28).

Georg Simmel's well-known account of urban life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century titled 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (1903) further attests to Malouf's assertions about a certain restlessness accompanying man's desire to improve and optimize his lot in the world. Simmel argues that man, especially in metropolitan centers such as Berlin and Paris, carries on a conflict with nature—a conflict in which he tries to maintain independence from social forces, the weight of historical heritage, and contemporaneous techne of life. To be successful in the struggle, he configures a protective shield around himself, a shield that is governed by rational mental processes instead of emotional and sensitive responses. As a result, the metropolitan man comes to be a stickler for 'virtues' such as punctuality, calculability, and exactness that capitalism celebrates as paradigmatic values of a hardworking individual (Simmel 2002: 11-13).

Based on the above discussion, it can be argued that the self-optimizing and improving human being must work continuously for the betterment of his or her own self, the time and place he or she inhabits, and the world that he or she

supposedly makes for succeeding generations. Self-improvement and betterment then are not only assumed to benefit the subject who endeavors to progress but are also purported to drive the development of human society in the future. Self-optimization, in other words, goes hand in hand with restlessness, work, and activity. The following section of the present paper will argue that Eliot's 'Prufrock' adopts a disinterested and liminal position towards the problem of self-improvement precisely because its narrative does not consolidate the capitalist and progressivist ethos of relentless work and activity. Eliot's speaker repeatedly lingers, dithers, and digresses in his monologue and makes the readers of the poem reconsider normative assumptions about the apparently necessary work required to pursue self-improvement and optimization. In the process, the repetition itself scrutinizes the need to self-optimize and creates fresh possibilities of self-imagination and linguistic expression vis-à-vis contingencies of time and space.

II

As stated earlier, the method used in this paper in perusing 'Prufrock' will be close-reading certain extracts and sections from the poem. The method is not coincidental as it has been chosen after careful consideration of the argument presented here thus far. If one looks at the discussion carefully, it establishes that the human instinct to self-optimize goes hand in hand with the given requirement for him or her to work continuously. In the same breath, it suggests that 'Prufrock' takes a critical look at this conventional relationship between self-improvement and restlessness and thus subverts capitalism. But how can the poem be a critique of capitalist ethos specifically if the relationship between self-improvement and restlessness is constitutive of even the origin myths of human life on the planet?

Elizabeth S. Goodstein's classic study, *Experience Without Qualities: Boredom and Modernity* (2005), provides a clue towards resolving the conundrum. Goodstein argues that boredom entails that the identity of the modern subject can no longer be anchored in the fabric of collective meaning as provided by forces such as religion and history. The modern subject is disenchanted in boredom and this disenchantment is the key constituent of his or her lived reality. Yet, as Goodstein suggests, the subject's rejection of the everyday, his or her lived experience of nihilism and disaffectedness in the quotidian and daily, is precisely what may appear to be a timeless aspect of the human condition. The skeptical, critical distance that boredom entails, in other words, is undermined the moment the phenomenon is regarded as a universal and natural situation. In Goodstein's words,

lived as a pseudo-religious revelation of the ultimate meaninglessness of existence, such ennui obscures its own historical specificity as a symptom of the particular losses that plague modern subjects. In thereby effacing the historicity of the crisis of meaning with which it is associated, boredom exemplifies the deterioration of Enlightenment into mythology. (Goodstein 2005: 3-4)

As suggested earlier, Goodstein comes up with a solution to this problem. She admits that boredom resembles and resonates with older forms of malaise such as *taedium vitae*, *horror loci*, acedia, and melancholy. Yet, she asserts that boredom is not exactly synonymous with any of them because any experience of discontent cannot be abstracted from the language in which it is expressed and the historical and cultural context in which it is embedded—a specific ethos, in other words, that she calls "rhetoric of reflection". The language of melancholy, for example, suggests a deviation from the ideal of a homeostatic balance of humors in the body while acedia represents a spiritual disconnect between the human and the divine. Boredom, on the other hand, stands for a recognizably and particularly modern manner of thinking about human existence as it is simultaneously the bane of modern subjects and a homeopathic strategy for stabilizing identity in a world of interminable change (Goodstein 2005: 4). It is in the same vein as Goodstein's analysis of boredom as a uniquely modern problem then that the present essay chooses to close-read passages from 'Prufrock'. Perhaps there cannot even be a better way of responding to the language of the poem's expression, to its rhetoric of reflection, so to say, as close-reading singularly allows for attention to be paid to linguistic inscriptions, possibilities, and enunciations in representation.

The orientation will also resonate, again not coincidentally, with how Derek Attridge and Henry Staten engage with the poem in their refreshing work *The Craft of Poetry: Dialogues on Minimal Interpretation* (2015). In their reading of 'Prufrock', they make it a point to emphasize that even though a skeletal structure can be shown as underlying the poem's narrative, its various elements such as metaphors, irregular rhyme patterns, and bewildering imagery cannot be explained completely. These stylistic features of the poem, Attridge and Staten argue, invite the reader to engage and re-engage with its narrative as they possess the potential to present new possibilities and imaginations each time they are perused (Attridge/Staten 2015: 108-127).[3] There is another key reason for the present essay's preference for Attridge and Staten's reading of 'Prufrock'. Most criticism of the poem fails to establish a relationship between the speaker's attitude of disinterest and boredom therein and new possibilities of linguistic and epistemological

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3   Apart from Attridge and Staten's reading of 'Prufrock', see their book for interesting takes on other well-known poems such as William Shakespeare's 'Sonnet 116', Wilfred Owen's 'Futility', and Denise Riley's 'A Nueva York'.

enunciation that its patterns of repetition configure. Frank Lentricchia, for example, rightly suggests that the poem's persona makes layered gestures of "irony, indifference, and tiredness" but errs in arguing that such gestures only signify the persona's (and Eliot's) battles with conventional linguistic expression and literary inheritance (Lentricchia 1994: 242-244). Martin Scofield, similarly, astutely recognizes that the images evoked in 'Prufrock' serve to "disconcert the reader, and to widen his sense of the possibilities of language and alert him to the way in which language is likely to be stretched in the poem" but does not see any relation between such experience of reading the poem and the attitudes of its narrative persona (Scofield 1988: 50-51). Recent work by the likes of Jewel Spears Brooker does not even allow the poem's speaker to possess any self-consciousness agency or awareness and reads his entire persona as a "type" that "dramatizes painful psychological and social conflicts." According to Brooker, such personality-types represent "thought-tormented figures who are paralyzed by the disjunction between thought and body, mind and action" (Brooker 2018: 1-2).

The following stanza constitutes the famous opening of Eliot's 'Prufrock':

> Let us go then, you and I,
> When the evening is spread out against the sky
> Like a patient etherized upon a table;
> Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
> The muttering retreats
> Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
> And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
> Streets that follow like a tedious argument
> Of insidious intent
> To lead you to an overwhelming question...
> Oh, do not ask, 'What is it?'
> Let us go and make our visit. (Eliot 1963: 3)

In the whole stanza, there is not even a single suggestion of the speaker taking an active lead with regard to either making a decision or describing the context in which he appears to be situated. He invites the "you" to come along with him only because something that had begun even before the beginning of the poem's narrative has come to its conclusion—indicated, clearly, by the "then" in the opening line. The evening is pale and sick(ening) and appears to be an etherized patient. The other adjectives too establish the sense of the speaker not occupying a specific, stable position—he is on the edge somewhere, neither here nor there. So, even the streets are neither deserted nor crowded, they are "half-deserted". Similarly, the retreats are neither silent nor loud, they are "muttering". Even the proposed action of going or moving is qualified to the extent that one begins to doubt the speaker's

resolve. The streets, for example, are not marked by any great activity on the part of pedestrians or vehicles. They are not only half-deserted but follow "like a tedious argument / of insidious intent". It thus seems that much like an argument in which he has participated repeatedly, the speaker has taken these very streets in the past to know in the present that they do not lead to any clear resolution or destination and have "insidious intent". Unsurprisingly, the "overwhelming question" they lead to does not even get articulated. And, the you is invited again to go with the speaker in what appears to be an interminable cycle.

The pattern of either not taking any active action or of doing something without resolve has been rightly identified by Marjorie Perloff as (the speaker's) "torpor" in her acute reading of the stanza's prosody. Perloff underlines that the poem's opening gesture--"Let us go then, you and I"—has seven monosyllables which demand a certain stress in being read aloud or recited. The stress, combined with the caesura that follows "then", creates a note of torpor, "an inability to move". This stasis gets further accented, argues Perloff, as the poem's overture rhymes with the second line— "When the evening is spread out against the sky"—which is eleven syllables long and has at least six primary stresses. Additionally, the second line of the poem leads to the "catatonic torpor" of the third line— "Like a patient etherized upon a table"—which is even longer with twelve syllables, is ungainly, and marked by the odd movement of falling to rising rhythm in the second half (Perloff 2011: 257). Needless to say, the trend of increasing syllable length, the prominent marks of cadence and stress, and the awkward rhythm at the end of the stanza cause the reading experience to mirror the passive, bored, and indifferent attitude of the poem's speaker.

The speaker's situation gets reflected even in the functioning of the yellow fog or smoke which is figured in 'Prufrock' as a cat. It does not, for example, spread across the evening authoritatively. Rather, it "licks its tongues" into the corners of dusk. Similarly, it "lingers" upon "the pools that stand in drains" and "lets" the soot from chimneys fall upon its back. Yet, for both the you and the yellow fog, there is an assurance from the speaker—the assurance that "there will be time". The speaker repeatedly asserts that there will be time, time for "a hundred indecisions" and "a hundred visions and revisions" (Eliot 1963: 3-4). These affirmations suggest that he is not only unlikely to take any decision in the present but is also likely to revise again and again, in case he was to arrive at some resolution in the future. The irony in the situation becomes apparent if one carefully considers what his assurance entails. The speaker assures the you of there being indecisions in the future. In other words, he assures the you that there will be time (left) in the future to not decide or to decide to not decide. Similarly, he assures the you that there will be time (left) in the future to revise all their visions. Again, it appears that the underlying motivation in the speaker, if he can be said to have any motivation at all, is to not take decisions and revise them repeatedly if at all they are reached in the future.

Zulfikar Ghose and Denis Donoghue rightly underline, regarding the passage about fog and smoke, that the latter are not referents which get 'actually' described in the poem. While reading about the fog, for example, the reader does not see or experience it for what it is. Rather, he or she becomes "engaged in some habit or the other of language" and is "distracted by peripheral matter." The object here may indeed be fog but the words that work out the elaborate metaphor are about a cat. So, every time that the reader tries to look at the fog, he or she ends up staring at a cat (Ghose 1978: 46). Additionally, the lines do not quite describe a city under fog as the references that enable the reader to imagine the scene are not independent of the speaker's state of mind and disposition. The plural nouns—"corners, pools, and drains", for example, generalize his or her impression and "release the language from the mundane duty of referring to something: no particular corner, pool, or drain is intended." The fog and the cat do not even hold their respective places as they do not exist in a definite and mutual relationship with each other. The verbs, "made a sudden leap" and "curled", imply a cat but "licked its tongue into the corners of the evening" suggests more fog than the cat. In effect, as Donoghue asserts, the impact of the passage in 'Prufrock' is that which keeps the readers of the poem among the words and their internal relations. It is as if "the apparent local meanings [of words and expressions] were an unfortunate but necessary distraction…We are not allowed to escape from the words into another place" (Donoghue 2000).

Even when the you disappears from the scene in the poem, the speaker cannot give up his reassuring orientation and thus comes to provide solace to himself. And, poignantly, the gesture of self-confidence comes almost as a response to very clear provocations from the outside, voices that will demand self-improvement and optimization from him by ridiculing his thinning hair, modest clothes, and lanky frame. He cannot respond to any of them as he is certain that he has time, as a minute is apparently enough to take decisions, revise them, and even reverse them. Clearly, he would not dare to "disturb the universe" as he expresses assurance in the time he will have to "dare" and, "dare".

> And indeed there will be time
> To wonder, 'Do I dare?' and, 'Do I dare?'
> Time to turn back and descend the stair,
> With a bald spot in the middle of my hair—
> (They will say: 'How his hair is growing thin!')
> My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
> My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin—
> (They will say: 'But how his arms and legs are thin!')
> Do I dare
> Disturb the universe?
> In a minute there is time
> For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse. (Eliot 1963: 4)

In evocations like the "tedious" streets which figure in the poem's opening stanza, the speaker seems to imply that the reason for him not daring to take control of the situation and force the issue, as it were, is that he is too familiar with the entire circumstance, the whole setup. He claims that he knows the "evenings, mornings, afternoons", "voices dying with a dying fall", "eyes", and "arms" thoroughly and completely. Additionally, he claims that he is not a prophet or some great man who will have some important matter to report or decide upon. The readers of 'Prufrock' thus are neither told what the matter at hand is nor whether it is the same as asking the overwhelming question or disturbing the universe. Moreover, when the speaker ultimately claims that he is afraid even as the "eternal footman" (death) holds on to his coat and snickers at him, one begins to wonder if the (not-so) great matter, of disturbing the universe, may even be of accepting the truth of human mortality (Eliot 1963: 4-6).

While affirming his familiarity with everything including items used in everyday human lives such as "cups", "marmalade", "tea", and "porcelain", the speaker unsurprisingly begins to ask if it would have been worthwhile after all to force the issue, to ask the overwhelming question. And, just as the readers of 'Prufrock' expect that they will finally get to know as to what the overwhelming question may be, the speaker digresses and comes to wonder if they would know even if he were to say it aloud. He suggests that it is not only impossible for humans to say what they mean, it is even impossible for them to say that they did not at all mean what they may have said. The moment in which the overwhelming question is to be articulated in Eliot's poem, in other words, leads to an anti-climactic but potent suggestion about the ultimate incompatibility between human (in)ability to speak (in) language and language itself.

> And would it have been worth it, after all,
> Would it have been worth while,
> After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,
> After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor—
> And this, and so much more?—
> It is impossible to say just what I mean!
> But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen:
> Would it have been worth while
> If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,
> And turning toward the window, should say:
> 'This is not it at all,
> That is not what I meant, at all'. (Eliot 1963: 6-7)

The present discussion of Eliot's 'Prufrock' should make it clear that its speaker exhibits orientations and attitudes that do not at all go with the restlessness

that Malouf and Simmel have identified as the hallmark of the self-optimizing and improving human being across history. Instead of investing himself in hard work that would apparently make the planet a better place for future generations, he is disinclined towards even making a decision. He also exudes confidence that he will have the time to revisit and revise even those decisions that he may reach sometime. His sheer lack of activity borders on passivity, he lets himself get caught in situations where his gestures and suggestions, at best, carry negligible force and authority. Moreover, he does not even respond to provocations that may arise from various sources—voices and people around him, death, and even his self-consciousness—to improve and optimize his lot. He will be ridiculed for how he looks, how he behaves, and how he dresses but all is to no avail. Such is his indifference and disinterest in self-improvement and optimization that he asks if it is worthwhile at all to even attempt to address the question. When there is no congruence between what we want to say and what we end up saying, he seems to ask, is there any point in saying or doing anything at all? And, not to forget, this whole situation in which the speaker finds himself in 'Prufrock' appears to have taken place again and again. There is a repetitive logic to it, as if what the poem's readers peruse is merely another instance of him being disinterested, then coming close to articulating the reason behind the disinterest without actually doing so, and then withdrawing to the 'initial' position in which he expresses his disinterest.

In the light of the above, the question that the present essay must contend with is this—is it enough to argue and demonstrate that Eliot's 'Prufrock' takes a contrarian position vis-à-vis the problem of self-optimization, a position that neither supports nor opposes it directly, a position that is instead liminal and singular in refusing to engage with it? As underlined earlier in the paper, one could refer to Derrida's suggestion here that iterability and repetition in literature are not mechanical exercises that entail the mere restatement of the same. Instead, each rhetorical articulation, each speech act, entails spatio-temporal difference, or what Derrida terms *différance*, on account of how it defers and thus mediates the metaphysical will to write and speak unambiguously. In his words, "*Differer* [in this sense] is to temporize, to take recourse, consciously or unconsciously, in the temporal and temporizing mediation of a detour that suspends the accomplishment or fulfillment of 'desire' or 'will,' and equally effects this suspension in a mode that annuls or tempers its own effect" (Derrida 1982: 8).

What is it that makes the same articulation differ and defer according to the context? Derrida argues that "the trace", whose very working is constituted by erasure, gets inscribed or traced in the text of metaphysics. The latter document then comes to bear the mark of what it loses, reserves, and ultimately puts aside. Consequently, the (temporal and metaphysical) present becomes "the sign of the sign", "the trace of the trace". It does not remain what even the immediately previous

reference refers to. It becomes a function in a structure of unspecific reference, "a trace, and a trace of the erasure of the trace" (Derrida 1982: 24). Unsurprisingly, as Derrida underlines, metaphysical thinking inscribes writing with infallible value—a value that it cannot allow to be shaken. Hence, metaphysical discourse "supplements" the nodes at which it confronts its own limits. The supplement, in this sense, is an addition to the faults of the structure. However, the supplement remains a replacement as it cannot overcome the void at the center of the metaphysical enterprise. It is, in other words, an insufficient compensation, a substitute that provides no relief to metaphysics (Derrida 1997: 142-144). Much like the trace's undoing of presence, the essential need of metaphysics to have supplementation reveals that the supplementation cannot come to an end. Metaphysical reason surely cannot conceive that the im-mediacy of presence, of the thing itself, of originary perception, is a mirage. Hence, as Derrida underlines, the interminable and ever-increasing chain of supplements "produces the sense of the very thing it defers" (Derrida 1997: 157).

Another way of suggesting that iterability in literature and language is not an ineffectual and meaningless repetition of the same, in line with Derrida's arguments detailed above, is to argue that *différance* and the trace undo metaphysical thought to produce (glimpses of) fresh possibilities, especially in temporal and spatial terms. Since *différance* and the trace are structured in terms of erasure, their impact cannot be expected to be permanent, static, or eternal. They would simply be surrendering themselves to metaphysics if they functioned in this manner. Accordingly, one could revisit some of the passages from 'Prufrock' already referred to above to see the kind of radical spatio-temporal imaginations they call for. When the speaker asserts, for instance, that there will be time yet "for a hundred indecisions" and "for a hundred visions and revisions", the very grammar and syntax of the lines exert immense pressure on the imagination of the readers. The speaker, located in the present for the reader, is affirming that there will be time left in the future for not deciding to decide at least a hundred times. Similarly, in the reader's present, the speaker suggests that his future self will have time enough to not only imagine his future but also to revise it. In both these constructions, in other words, the reader is expected to handle at least three temporalities simultaneously—his or her own present which may be taken to be the present of the speaker of the poem, the latter's future, and the (in)decision or re(vision) that the latter might commit in the future of the future. There is comparable complexity in the speaker's affirmation that there will be time in the future for him "[T]o wonder, 'Do I dare?' and, 'Do I dare?'". The speaker again demands radical spatio-temporal shifts in the reader's imagination. He suggests that he will wonder in the future, wonder about daring to undertake some action. But he imagines the passage of time even between two successive articulations in the future. Otherwise, it would not make

sense to not only have the repetition of "'Do I dare?'" but to also have it separated and joined with the conjunction "and [,]".

Needless to state, with every such articulation that problematizes the imaginations of the readers of 'Prufrock', the poem presents the speaker as being capable of such liminal but powerful imagination in the first place. He may thus indeed not be like Prince Hamlet but is surely like the Fool— "an easy tool/deferential, glad to be of use" but also "a bit obtuse" (Eliot 1963: 7). Both the speaker and readers of the poem, put differently, cannot let their self-imaginations be curtailed and limited by the seemingly circular and repetitive logic of its narrative. The poem may be disinterested towards problems of self-optimization and improvement, but it certainly is not bound to an ineffectual aesthetic of insignificant iterability. Eliot's 'Prufrock', in other words, can be read as a potent critique of the logics of improvement, betterment, and optimization that govern the currently prevalent capitalist ethos across the world. Moreover, as its speaker or central presence adopts an impassive, disinterested, and even bored attitude that recurs throughout, the recurrence can generate new possibilities for the imagination of time and space that do not concur with those of global capitalism. Capitalism desires, needs, and thrives on both time and space being made subject to precise calculation. The temporal and spatial enunciations possible in and through 'Prufrock' are radical precisely because they are *possible* enunciations, enunciations that are yet to come, and hence outside human bounds of calculable and deterministic imagination.

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Izboljšati ali ne izboljšati: liminalne iteracije jaza v Eliotovem "Prufrocku"

S. Eliot je leta 1915 v pesmi »Ljubezenska pesem o J. Alfredu Prufrocku« (The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock) večkrat zabeležil potrebo po samooptimizaciji kot odzivu na različne provokacije. Vendar se pripovedovalec nanje nikoli ne more odzvati na način, ki bi izboljšal njegov osebni položaj ali mu prinesel družbeno priznanje. Ker nikoli ne zanika potrebe po izboljšanju, ta nezmožnost preide v nezainteresiranost za samo vprašanje izboljšanja. Ta esej trdi, da pripovedovalčeva (ne)zmožnost podpiranja ali nasprotovanja samouresničitvi oz. samooptimizaciji v «Prufrocku» kaže na liminalen položaj v zvezi s problemom, položaj, v katerem je jaz brezbrižen, ravnodušen in morda celo zdolgočasen. Toda četudi je ta konfiguracija (ne)zmožnosti, ki vodi v nezainteresiranost, v pesmi večkrat izpostavljena, je ni mogoče razumeti kot neučinkovite in nesmiselne. Nasprotno, navidezno neskončno ponavljanje te ureditve prinaša nove možnosti za imaginacijo samoumevnosti sobivanja jaza s kontingencami časa, prostora in izraza.

Ključne besede: samouresničitev, liminalnost, iteracije, možnosti, kontingenca

The Significance of Colours in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*

Nina Jakoša

Abstract

The article provides a corpus-assisted analysis of colour terms in Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula*. The aim of the analysis is to establish whether colours contribute to the novel's Gothic mood. Colours can be used to evoke specific atmospheres; they also bear symbolic meanings. This makes them a powerful option for enhancing the mood of a Gothic horror novel. The analysis indicates that white, red and black are the most important colours in *Dracula*, appearing in distinct patterns and contexts.

Keywords: Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, colour symbolism, Gothic novel, corpus stylistics

INTRODUCTION

Colours are a powerful means for evoking specific moods, making them particularly useful in genres like Gothic fiction. This article examines colour terms in the Gothic novel *Dracula* (first published in 1897) to establish whether they contribute to a distinct stylistic effect. The corpus-assisted analysis focuses on three colours commonly associated with vampires – red, black and white – but also examines other colours that might be less typically mentioned in relation with them.

Stoker's *Dracula*, a story about defeating a vampire, belongs to the Gothic horror genre, making it an interesting subject for stylistic research due to the moods it evokes. According to Cuddon (308), works belonging to the Gothic genre feature supernatural elements, dark and barren landscapes, forests, ruins and castles; they also include supernatural creatures or apparitions, such as demons, witches and ghosts. Additionally, authors of Gothic novels like to include "descriptions of picturesque scenery" (Cuddon 535). These elements can also be found in Stoker's *Dracula*. The events of the novel unfold in places generally considered dark and threatening, such as the count's mysterious castle, graveyard, and asylum. Foucault (24) refers to such places as heterotopias, which are "something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted". In *Dracula*, the asylum and graveyard are examples of heterotopias. According to Foucault (25), an asylum is a heterotopia of deviation, a place for individuals deviating from societal standards, and the cemetery is a strange place "unlike ordinary cultural spaces". Therefore, some settings in *Dracula* are inherently places in which individuals experience unsettling and difficult situations. Combined with supernatural characters and events, one of the Gothic novel's characteristics is crafting a special atmosphere of suspense, which can be achieved in various ways.

Wolstenholme (6) notes that "Gothic fiction is frequently described as having a particularly 'visual' quality". Consequently, the use of descriptive language that results in a distinct mood is a viable research topic. This article focuses on one of the many possible ways of conveying visuals, i.e. by emphasising colour. Vampires, creatures found in various folklores, can be closely associated with three colours in particular: red because of the blood that they drink, black because they are creatures of darkness who avoid sunlight, and white because of their ghostly pallor and sharp white teeth.

COMMON MEANINGS OF COLOURS

Colours can have a literal, metaphorical, metonymical and symbolic meaning (Čeh Steger 101). One of their basic functions is enabling us to distinguish objects and phenomena from one another, but they also spark imagination and intuition, influence people's mental and physical states, reflect emotions and create particular atmospheres (Čeh Steger 91). The latter function is the most significant one for the analytical section of this article.

Previous research has established common meanings associated with individual colours. Black conventionally represents death, sorrow, evil and foreignness but also the non-negative characteristic of humbleness; it is the contrast of white – if black is darkness, white is light (Butzer and Jacob 386). Chevalier and Gheerbrant (90) note that the symbolic meaning of black is usually negative. White relates to innocence, virginity, holiness and virtue but also death (Butzer and Jacob 481); moreover, it is considered a colour of transitioning or crossing over, making it a useful element of rituals associated with death and rebirth (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 52). Red is commonly associated with life force, passion, power, blood and fire (Butzer and Jacob 353) as well as the devil, anger and embarrassment (Ferber 169). Yellow signifies light, life, envy, suffering and transience (Butzer and Jacob 147); it can also be a sign of disease (Ferber 244). Purple is associated with transitions, balance, expensiveness and royalty as well as concealed or arcane parts of reality (Butzer and Jacob 466). Blue is connected with melancholy, death, mysteriousness, transcendence, infinity, the sky and the sea (Butzer and Jacob 53). Green is mainly associated with nature (Ferber 89); symbolically, it is connected to life, hope, inexperience, envy and demonic forces (Butzer and Jacob 168). Grey is related to the uncanny, melancholy, age and liminal situations (Butzer and Jacob 163). Orange can represent balance since it is a mix of yellow and red, and brown is mainly connected to the colour of soil (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 413, 512).

Well-established meanings of colours thus show that they could easily be incorporated into the Gothic context in which they would create a specific mood or atmosphere. This is particularly so in the case of black and white as polar opposites representing darkness and light as well as red as the colour of blood. Additionally, blue and green bear meanings connected to the supernatural, which is the main antagonist force in *Dracula*.

METHODOLOGY

The analysis was based on concordance searches containing basic words for individual colours (black, white, red, grey, blue, green, yellow, pink, purple, orange and brown)[1] using the CLiC corpus (Mahlberg et al.). Instances where colours are part of a proper name (such as *the Black Sea* or *Bethnal Green*, an area in London) were eliminated, since these do not contribute to the mood of the novel. Corpus search results for each colour were reviewed and analysed with a focus on establishing potential patterns in the occurrence of individual colours.

ANALYSIS

There are 29 relevant results in the concordance search for the term *black*. The colour appears in two significant patterns of usage. Firstly, black is used to describe a person, specifically their clothing and appearance. Secondly, it is used to describe a place, particularly a landscape or a building. Dracula is, as per Jonathan Harker's observation, dressed in all black ("clad in black from head to foot, without a single speck of colour"; Stoker 18), and his castle has "tall black windows" from which "came no ray of light" (Stoker 17). That black is Dracula's signature colour is also corroborated by other characters, such as Dr Seward, who immediately recognizes the count when seeing him for the first time ("a tall, thin man, all in black"; Stoker 267).

A poignant example of black contributing to the suspense is in the section of the novel in which Harker and his companions chase Dracula in the Transylvanian wilderness to kill him: "The moonlight suddenly failed, as a great black cloud sailed across the sky" (Stoker 262). Black collocates with clouds in a few other examples, such as when Harker is being driven to the count's castle for the first time ("just then the moon, sailing through the black clouds, appeared behind the jagged crest of a beetling"; Stoker 16) and when Mina Harker is looking for Lucy Westenra, who is wandering outside at night ("There was a bright full moon, with heavy black, driving clouds"; Stoker 86). Another instance of black as a contributor to fear and suspense is in Mina's narrative as she describes waking up frightened in the middle of the night ("All was dark and silent, the black shadows thrown by the moonlight seeming full of a silent mystery of their own"; Stoker 240). The examples listed convey a sense of unease.

A search for *white* yields 102 concordance results. Salient mentions of this colour relate to fear, teeth and the appearance of the vampires. White often premodifies nouns or nominal phrases for articles of clothing (e.g. "white linen shirts"

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1   An influential study on the colour vocabulary in various languages was conducted by Berlin and Kay. The analysis in this article was done using only the basic eleven colour terms used in English.

and "white shirt-sleeves"; Stoker 7). In some of these examples, the whiteness of the clothing is juxtaposed with red, possibly symbolising the clash between innocence and passion ("Her white nightdress was smeared with blood"; Stoker 262; "When she raised it, his white night-robe was stained with blood where her lips had touched"; Stoker 264).

White is notably used to emphasise the ghostly appearance of the vampires. There is a section in which Mina recalls seeing a "white figure" (Stoker 86) but is unsure of what it was. Dr Seward also sees a mysterious "white streak, moving between two dark yew-trees" (Stoker 185). White teeth are one of the signature features of the novel's vampires ("All three had brilliant white teeth, that shone like pearls against the ruby of their voluptuous lips"; Stoker 38; "the sharp white teeth glinted in the moonlight"; Stoker 259), particularly of Dracula ("The mouth, so far as I could see it under the heavy moustache, was fixed and rather cruel-looking, with peculiarly sharp white teeth"; Stoker 20). Wolves, which are under the count's command, also have dangerous white teeth ("I saw around us a ring of wolves, with white teeth and lolling red tongues"; Stoker 16).

Some characters in the novel are often frightened. Examples such as the following suggest an intense fear: "Mrs Harker grew ghastly white" (Stoker 314), "she stopped and grew white, and whiter still" (Stoker 321; note the intensification with a graded form of the adjective immediately after the base form). In comparison with black, white conveys a Gothic atmosphere in the environment less frequently. However, some examples can still be found, such as "There was in the room the same thin white mist that I had before noticed" (Stoker 266) and "white, wet clouds, which swept by in ghostly fashion" (Stoker 74).

Red, the third typical vampiric colour, appears in 69 relevant concordances. It most notably co-occurs with nouns denoting body parts, specifically lips, eyes and skin. Examples include the following: "the lamplight fell on a hard-looking mouth, with very red lips" (Stoker 13); "the fair cheeks blazing red with passion" (Stoker 39); "something long and dark with red eyes" (Stoker 93); "the Count's evil face, the ridge of the nose, the red eyes, the red lips, the awful pallor" (Stoker 234); "His white face looked out of the mist with His red eyes gleaming" (Stoker 260). The vampires' bites also leave behind red dots or marks ("two little red points like pin-pricks"; Stoker 88; "little white dots with red centres"; Stoker 91; "a red mark on her throat"; Stoker 116).

When contributing to atmosphere, the adjective *red* often appears in the close proximity of words denoting light ("the red light was thrown over on the East Cliff and the old Abbey, and seemed to bathe everything in a beautiful rosy glow"; Stoker 89). Red in the environment can evoke positive feelings ("how humanising to see the red lighting of the sky beyond the hill"; Stoker 195) or negative ones ("And then a red cloud, like the colour of blood, seemed to close over my eyes";

Stoker 260). After the final fight with Dracula, the sky is red because of the set-ting sun, symbolically signifying the end of the struggle ("The Castle of Dracula now stood out against the red sky, and every stone of its broken battlements was articulated against the light of the setting sun"; Stoker 350).

Grey, the colour derived from black and white, conveys negative or melancholy moods, as evident from the following evocative passage: "Everything is grey—ex-cept the green grass, which seems like emerald amongst it; grey earthy rock; grey clouds, tinged with the sunburst at the far edge, hang over the grey sea, into which the sand-points stretch like grey fingers" (Stoker 71). There are also two instances in which the colour is a metaphor for conveying sadness ("a grey look"; Stoker 268) or age ("her husband's grey head", Stoker 286). In total, this colour appears in 21 concordances.

Green evokes exclusively positive images in this novel. All 14 relevant occur-rences are from sentences describing a beautiful natural environment completely different from the count's dark castle ("Before us lay a green sloping land full of forests and woods"; Stoker 10; "I could see the green grass under the trees span-gled with the fallen petals"; Stoker 10; "The valley is beautifully green"; Stoker 61).

There are 14 relevant search results for blue. The colour most often appears in conjunction with the noun *flame*. This is connected with the folk belief explained to Harker by the coachman, who is, in reality, Dracula himself; it is believed that "on a certain night of the year—last night, in fact, when all evil spirits are sup-posed to have unchecked sway—a blue flame is seen over any place where treasure has been concealed" (Stoker 23–24). Blue flames appear when the count is using his powers ("I saw a faint flickering blue flame"; Stoker 15). Van Helsing, who assists with killing Dracula, prepares several tools and weapons for the undertak-ing, one of them being "gas which burned at fierce heat with a blue flame" (Stoker 199). In the novel, blue light generally bears negative connotations relating to the supernatural, unlike yellow light, which is portrayed as a positive natural force.

Yellow appears only in six instances. It mainly conveys the colour of light, thus contributing to the atmospheric visuals evoked by the text ("the beautiful expanse, bathed in soft yellow moonlight"; Stoker 35; "the yellow moonlight, flooding in through the diamond panes"; Stoker 36; "It is now not far off sunset time, and over the snow the light of the sun flow in big yellow flood"; Stoker 338). These examples are combined with kinaesthetic imagery of the light flooding or flowing through a setting, suggesting that it is a soothing and positive phenomenon, unlike the dark.

Although they are mentioned very infrequently, i.e. in five concordances com-bined, pink and purple contribute to a pleasant atmosphere in the following ex-amples: "the snowy mountain-top still held the sunset, and seemed to glow out with a delicate cool pink" (Stoker 11); "Before the sun dipped below the black mass of Kettleness, standing boldly athwart the western sky, its downward way

was marked by myriad clouds of every sunset-colour—flame, purple, pink, green, violet, and all the tints of gold" (Stoker 73); "Right and left of us they towered, with the afternoon sun falling full upon them and bringing out all the glorious colours of this beautiful range, deep blue and purple in the shadows of the peaks" (Stoker 10–11). These examples demonstrate the Gothic novel characteristic of including not only descriptions of the dark but also of the scenic.

Another colour with a marginal role in the novel is brown. It appears in four cases, all but one of which refer to a person's physical characteristics, namely the colour of hair and skin. The colour orange is only used in the nominal phrase *orange trees* and in the name of a company. As such, it has no role in building a Gothic atmosphere.

CONCLUSION

The corpus-assisted analysis of *Dracula* has shown that colour adjectives greatly contribute to the visual imagery created by the novel's descriptive language. However, there are some key differences in the frequency and positive or negative value of individual colours and their associated meanings. The distribution plots for each colour in the corpus show that they appear evenly spaced throughout the text; there are likely no chapters where at least one colour would not be mentioned, meaning that they are a noteworthy part of the text. The most frequently occurring colours are white, red, black and grey (with 102, 69, 29 and 21 relevant occurrences, respectively); each of the remaining analysed colours appears fewer than twenty times. Black, white and red also appear in distinct patterns and contexts. Black mainly refers to a person's appearance or describes the environment, white describes the vampires' appearance and occurs in the metaphorical sense to convey fear, and red often co-occurs with nouns for specific body parts, namely eyes and lips. Another colour that evokes a Gothic feeling is blue, since it relates to Dracula's supernatural powers. In terms of value, black never bears positive connotations, whereas white and red occur in both the positive and the negative sense, although the negative one tends to prevail as the two colours often refer to the appearance of vampires.

For a comprehensive study of colour terms in *Dracula*, it would be necessary to examine synonymous and closely related expressions for individual colours, such as inky and dark for black, snowy and ashen for white, and scarlet, ruby, crimson and ruddy for red. However, the analysis of basic expressions for colour indicates that the meanings and connotations of individual colours, particularly white, red and black, are an integral part of the novel and that they have a significant role in building its Gothic atmosphere.

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Pomen barv v romanu *Drakula* Brama Stokerja

Članek vsebuje s korpusom podprto analizo izrazov za barve v romanu *Drakula* Brama Stokerja. Namen analize je ugotoviti, ali barve prispevajo h gotskemu vzdušju romana. Barve se lahko uporabljajo za ustvarjanje določenega vzdušja, njihov pomen pa je tudi simbolni. Zato lahko močno okrepijo vzdušje v gotskem grozljivem romanu. Analiza nakazuje, da so bela, rdeča in črna najpomembnejše barve v romanu *Drakula*, saj se izrazi zanje pojavljajo v izrazitih vzorcih in kontekstih.

Ključne besede: Bram Stoker, *Drakula*, barvna simbolika, gotski roman, korpusna stilistika

Margaret Atwood's *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth*

Igor Maver

Abstract

Margaret Atwood's provocative book of non-fiction contains many literary references, which help to effectively highlight her points about such a topical matter as debt, debt as a philosophical, politico-economic, religious, and historical issue over the centuries. In the central chapters of the book she looks at the Protestant Reformation and the introduction of interest on loans and in this light analyzes the novels by Dickens, Irving, Thackeray and G. Eliot. Her final statement in the book is, however, about the ecological debt we all have to pay to Earth in order to ensure our existence.

Keywords: Margaret Atwood, Victorian literature, Charles Dickens, debt, ecology

In her creative non-fiction work about fiction and the world's ecological debt *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth* the internationally renowned Canadian woman writer Margaret Atwood examines debt, balance and revenge in history, society and particularly in English literature, debt as a driving force in (Western) fiction. She wrote it for the 2008 Massey Lectures and each of the five chapters in the book was delivered as a one hour lecture in a different Canadian city, which were broadcast on CBC Radio One in November 2008.

Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth (2008) is certainly a most provocative and thought-engaging book which addressed the topical matter of debt at the time of the world economic crisis. Debt is considered as a philosophical, historical, political, economic and religious issue over the centuries: in truth the author provides an intellectual history of debt. It is divided into five chapters titled »Ancient Balances«, »Debt and Sin«, »Debt as Plot«, »The Shadow Side« and »Payback«. In Chapter One she clearly defines he subject-matter of her book: »… it's about debt as a human construct – thus an imaginative construct – and how this construct mirrors and magnifies both voracious human desire and ferocious human fear« (*Payback* 2). The writer traces from ancient history onwards the feminine priciple of balance/scale in the concept of justice (Iustitia), including Ma'at, Themis, Nemesis, Sekhmet, Astrea, and significantly asks herself why is it that »with the exception of the Christian and the Muslim ones, the supernatural justice figures … are all female« (34). In relation to the ancient Egyptian goddess of Ma'at she writes that it meant

> … truth, justice, balance, the governing principles of nature and the universe, the stately progression of time – days, months, seasons, years. …Its opposite was physical chaos, selfishness, falsehood, evil behaviour – any sort of upset in the divinely ordained pattern of things. (27)

She maintains that the female Justice figures have persisted until this day, because the period of the Great Goddessess was followed by several thousand years of rigorous mysogyny, during which goddesses were replaced by gods and women were downgraded. The ancient balance of the scales was thus broken.

In the second chapter Atwood dwells on debt and sin and says that the borrowing and lending process is something of a shadowland transaction, partly theft and partly trade, provided that a reasonable and not exaggerated interest is paid and the money eventually returned to the lender. She refers to Christianity in the Western world and claims that in this religious system Christ is called the redeemer, a term drawn directly from the language of debt and pawning or pledging, scapegoats, »sin-eaters« etc, because the Devil keeps his account books constantly in good order and payback time will surely arrive.

> … the whole of Christianity rests on the notion of spiritual debts and what must be done to repay them, and how you might get out of paying by having someone else pay instead. And it rests, too, on a long pre-Christian history of scapegoat figures - including human sacrifices - who take your sins away for you. (67)

»…and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us…« (The Holy Father Prayer, The Bible). In the Slovenian translation of the Bible the noun »trespasses« is rendered as »debts« and consequently refers to debtors, which have to be forgiven. Forgiving the debts on the part of the lender: is there in this Christian attitude perhaps Maragret Atwood›s underlying Christian principle of a payback or a bailout (especially as regards spiritual debts, of course), payoff and primarily a generous leveling out of balances on either side in the long run?

From the point of view of literary allusiveness Chapter Three »Debt as Plot« is particularly relevant, where she looks at the Protestant Reformation and the introduction of interest on loans: When Henry the Eighth ascended the throne, interest-charging was legalized for Christians in England, which gave rise the the expansion of the market and in the nineteenth century the explosion of capitalism in the West. In this light Atwood alludes to the the work of Charles Dickens, Christopher Marlowe, Washington Irving, W. M. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and even the novel *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë. Atwood's debt-reading of the all-time classic *Wuthering Heights* (1847) is very much to the point here:

> Heathcliff of *Wuthering Heights* loves Cathy passionately and hates his rival, Linton, but the weapon with which he is able to act out his love and his hate is money, and the screw he twists is debt: he becomes the owner of the estate called Wuthering Heights by putting its owner in debt to him. (*Payback* 100)

The Victorian novel *Vanity Fair* (1847-48) is especially about goods, material and spiritual, and, as Atwood observes, we watch the grim business of Amelia Sedley's family bankrupcy, but we also follow the brilliant but socially inferior gold-digger, Becky Sharp, climb her way up the social ladder. Everything that can be bought and sold, rent or lent is *vanitas*, Thackeray teaches us. Flaubert's bored provincial wife Emma Bovary, too, is eventually punished for her »shopaholicism« rather than extramarital sex, because her overspending and consequent debt catches up and exposes her secret life. Lily Bart in Edith Wharton's novel *House of Mirth* (1905) is not versed in debt-managing which brigs her down and should have known better that »if a man lends you money and charges no interest, he's going to want payment of some other kind« (106).

Millers are in folklore often rendered as thieves and cheats who supposedly steal from peasant by weighing short and use some of their flour to their own benefit, and if you are a miller's daughter like Maggie Tulliver from *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) you are likely to suffer the consequences of the miller's misdeeds. Mr. Tulliver, however, is an honest miller and finds himself in financial difficulties and because of that his adversary buys his mill: he loses his final lawsuit and runs his family into debt. Margaret Atwood turns the established »proto-feminist« readings of the novel with Maggie as a clever independent but thwarted woman born before her time upside down and asks herself:

> But what if we read it as the story of Mr. Tulliver's debt? For it's this debt that's the engine of the novel: it shoves the plot along, changes the mental states of the characters, and determines their scope of action. (116)

Tom and Maggie suffer greatly the consequences of their father's deeds and eventually drown in a flood, reconciled at the very end. Tulliver's adversary Wakem is saved in the end which Atwood rightly sees as the turning-point and the proof of the emerging Victorian materialism constituted in Law: »Power has moved from those who process material goods to those who process the contracts that govern them. Hermes – god of commerce, thieves, lies, contrivances, tricks, and mechanisms – has switched allegiances« (119). And what is the situation like today? The question clearly remains rhetorical. The novels alluded to by Atwood are thus essentially about money, debt and payback, albeit not exclusively of course, with payback not always achieved in full. The allusions to 19th and early 20th century novels she draws upon lend a totally new dimension to the notion of debt Atwood deals with in *Payback*.

And then there is the question of gift-giving within the context of the »life games« people play. The constant give-and-take process, which is the essence of social life, cannot be aborted by either party: »/G/ifts are rendered, received and repaid both obligatorily and in one's own interest, in magnanimity, for repayment of services, or as challenges or pledges« (Mauss 27, qtd in Zabus 123). In a post-colonial context, however, the concept of gift may be just the opposite of hospitality, help and generosity, it may have the meaning of »poison« (cf. the German *Gift*), for the debtor is expected to pay back with subordination.

The main literary work of Atwood's allusions in *Payback* is Charles Dickens's extremely popular book *A Christmas Carol* (1843) in the 19th century criticised openly the emerging Victorian materialistic self-satisfaction and containment, which helped to establish the Western non-religious concept of Christmas and the need for the transformation of the loan-sharking lender Ebenezer Scrooge into a beneficent forgiving character, who is taken directly from the London Stock

Exchange and whose main concern and value in life is business. During Christmas he is visited by a ghost and the three spirits and utterly changed thereafter. The tale is generally seen as an indictment of nineteenth century industrial capitalism and Dickens got the idea form his own humiliating experience of debt from his childhood; when his father John Dickens was arrested for debt and put in prison, he had to leave school, sell all of his books and take up a job in a blacking factory. At the beginning of the tale Ebenezer (cf. Squeezer) Scrooge's nephew reminds him that Merry Christmas-time has come, Scrooge is very cross:

> 'What else can I be,' returned the uncle, 'when I live in such a world of fools as this? Merry Christmas! Out upon merry Christmas! What a Christmas–time to you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older, and not an hour richer, a time for balancing your books, and having every item in'em through a round dozen of months presented dead against you?' (Dickens 19)

At the end of the book he is much changed, of course, ready to share money with others especially on Christmas but also helping people for a change, in Atwood's terms one could say writing off debts: this only will make him happy and redeem him. He shouts his newfound happiness from the rooftops:

> 'I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a school-boy. I am as giddy as a drunken man. A Merry Christmas to everybody! A happy New Year to all the world! Hallo here!' (201)

Margeret Atwood claims that Dickens deliberately created a reverse Faustus from Christopher Marlowe's figure. Scrooge had symbolically made a pact with the devil, this malevolent creditor who tempts people with material benefits in exchange for their spitirual health and moral integrity, and Scrooge is a miser so extreme that he does not spend any money even on himself. When Scrooge at the beginning sees the ghost of his former business partner Marley, it warns him that his soul will be in fetters for eternity unless he changes his greedy behaviour and announces other ghosts to visit him that very Christmas night, which symbolizes Scrooge's forced transformation that is ultimately seen, even today, as a blessing and more broadly the restoration of social harmony and Victorian order. Dickens's book redefined and reintroduced the spirit of Christmas as a seasonal merriment after the Puritan authorities in the seventeenth century England and America supressed pre-Christian rituals associated with it: the religious and social implications of the book helped significantly to reinvent Christmas with emphasis on family, goodwill, and compassion. In her book Atwood traces the roots of Dickens's Scrooge in Goethe's and Marlowe's Dr Faustus, where Marlowe's character

is a bonvivant, a big-spender, who shares his wealth around very much like the reformed Scrooge at the end of Dickens's book. Atwood likewise insightfully traces the Faustian figure who is prepared to do everything for money in Washington Irving's story »The Devil and Tom Walker«, where Walker represents utter stinginess, ruthlessly grinding the people in need to the ground. Scrooge in Dickens, however, after being visited by Marley's ghost and the three spirits of Christmas is a changed man, he is

> …set free from his own heavy chain of cash-boxes at the end of the book, when, instead of sitting on his pile of money, he begins to spend it. …: the post-ghost Scrooge, for instance, doesn't give up his business, though whether it remained in part a moneylending business we aren't told. No, it's what you do with your riches that really counts. (98)

Atwood's latter-day literary character Scrooge Nouveau in a modernized Dickens's book *A Christmas Carol* appears in the fifth chapter of the book and he is like humanity today, at the time of global warming and ruthless depletion of natural resources, faced with two options, an eco-friendly world or a typically Atwoodian dystopian future with all kinds of disasters befalling the natural environment. It is pay-up time for humanity as a whole, Atwood warns us.

As always, the author knows just how to provide the right amount of humour on the most serious of issues such as debt, sin and payback, whether we see *Payback* as, »smart, funny and clever« (Liss) or »by no means the highlight of the book« (Ashenburg). John Gray in *The New York Review of Books* typically reads the book against the current US recession and writes that it »can be read as a defense of traditional beliefs about the hazards of debt« (Gray). He is right in surmising that in Atwood's book there is an implicit notion that we may now have to return to older and simpler practices of thrift and saving. However, Atwood is no economist and the solution to the problem of debt is not given, and when it is, it seems somewhat naive. Her vast knowledge and erudition is, however, always formidable: she convincingly shows in the best cultural materialist fashion how debt as leitmotiv and literary figures concerned with money predominate in Western fiction, »no matter how much the virtues of love may be waved idealistically aloft« (100) and how in her youth she thought the nineteenth-century novel was driven by love but now that she is older she sees that it was essentially driven by money. Margaret Atwood shows clearly the perils of debt and hints at the (im)possibility of a utopian future without greed and demonstrates how debt has indeed been a driving force in Western/Anglo-American fiction. She is perhaps a more successful writer of fiction than non-fiction, as some reviewers suggest, but she certainly is always very timely in her views and captures well

the esprit of the period. Louis Bayard, among others, complains in his review article of the book that

> Atwood never really distinguishes between »bad debt« (credit cards) and »good debt« (college loans, mortgages). The niceties of Keynesian economics, of microfinancing ventures, of the ways in which financial entities act as both borrowers and lenders … these are either beneath or beyond her«. (Bayard, cf. also Massie)

The writer's conclusion is far from conclusive: she is nonetheless able to introduce the theme of ecopolitics and global bailout which only can ensure our physical survival on Earth, for, as Atwood declares, all wealth comes from Nature and the only »serious« debts are those humanity owes to Mother Earth, i.e. ecological debts. Green politics, or ecopolitics, is a political ideology that aims to foster an ecologically sustainable society often rooted in environmentalism, nonviolence, and social justice, from the 1970s onwards. Consequently the planet Earth will reclaim the payback that humanity owes to it or else »Nature would be a lifeless desert… and the resulting debt to Nature would be infinite« (202). This urgent and most timely ecopolitical statement is Atwood's strongest *forte* in this creative non-fiction ecocritical work (cf. Buell 2005), where especially the multiple and well-chosen literary allusions are most engaging. Not only is she its forerunner but a cobuilder as well.

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Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth Margaret Atwood

Provokativna knjiga Margaret Atwood vsebuje veliko literarnih referenc, ki pripomorejo k učinkovitemu poudarjanju njenih poudarkov o tako aktualni temi, kot je dolg, dolg kot filozofsko, politično-ekonomsko, versko in zgodovinsko vprašanje skozi stoletja. V osrednjih poglavjih knjige obravnava protestantsko reformacijo in uvedbo obresti na posojila ter v tej luči analizira romane Dickensa, Irvinga, Thackeraya in Georga Eliota. Njena zadnja izjava v knjigi pa govori o ekološkem dolgu, ki ga moramo vsi plačati Zemlji, da bi si zagotovili obstoj.

Ključne besede: Margaret Atwood, viktorijanska književnost, Charles Dickens, dolg, ekologija

Negotiating War and Patriarchy: The Praxis of Death and Violence in *The Story of Zahra*

Haithm Zinhom

Abstract

The horrific scenes of the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990), which left the country in ruins, had a traumatic effect on the entire nation particularly the Lebanese author, Hanan al-Shaykh who was haunted by the nightmarish war memories until she managed to overcome them by reliving the whole experience through the events of her remarkable novel *The Story of Zahra*. Disillusioned by the political scene during the war and exasperated with the traditional artistic themes advocated by previous generations of war writers, al-Shaykh rejected the linear development of character, the sense of order and progression integral to the war literature in the Arab world. Instead, she captures the atrocities of war by creating a unique novel, giving the Lebanese tragedy mythic proportions and turning it into more than a historical event. In light of this background and within the context of contemporary war fiction studies, the paper critically examines al-Shaykh's novel in order to explore the deadly impact of war, which uproots the foundations of a civilized country turning it into a wasteland. The paper argues that the author creates a multi-layered narrative, which reflects the collapse of the moral and political structure of a patriarchal society paralyzed by coercive masculinity and devastated by sectarian violence. Navigating the protagonist's journey of suffering and pain during the brutal civil conflict, the paper uncovers the underpinnings of war interpreting the novel as a gendered reflection of a divided country. The paper also emphasizes that the author presents a counter-narrative exposing the ugly side of war and revealing how war catastrophically damages the social fabric of the nation.

Keywords: Hanan al-Shayk, war, Lebanon, patriarchy

INTRODUCTION

Joseph Waldmeir in *American Novels of the Second World War* divides the war novel tradition into three categories: Those novels, which are primarily concerned with "a realistic portrayal of combat", those which are "primarily studies of the effect of war upon an individual psyche", and those which are "above all else ideological" (Waldmeir1969: 10). In a similar context, Charles Eisinger divides war novels along ideological patterns. According to him, "the war novel has a kind of split personality. On the one hand, it is driven to savage attacks because the perceived reality falls short of the democratic and humane ideal and on the other, it feels compelled to praise the democratic virtues of the United States" (Eisinger 1963: 22). Further, John Frederick divides the war novelists into three categories as follows: "those attempting to present the total experience of a major phase of war, those dealing with experience in single branch of service over an extended area of time and action" in addition to "those limited in focus to brief time and relatively few characters" (Frederick 1956: 197).

In the same vein, Malcolm Cowley emphasizes the value of the war novels in "the great collaborative history they provide of all aspects of war - taken together, they cover a wide range of human experience "(Cowley 1955: 25). Moreover, Wayne Charles Miller's comments on the war novels are insightful and more comprehensive. Firstly, he refers to a division of fictional works, which incorporate war "almost exclusively as a location for adventure". In addition to the preceding division, Miller argues that the war novel branches into three general categories whose lines of demarcation occasionally overlap and frequently blur. These categories include novels, which are integral to the conventional war tradition, the novels that present warfare as a brutal but normal human experience, and the novels that while much less doctrinaire than their forerunners of previous wars, offer specific criticism of aspects of the societies engaged in war" (Miller 1970: 134).

In a related context, the war motif has been a central concern to Arab writers since antiquity. There is no doubt that since the pre-Islamic era, war played a vital role when life was a matter of survival for Arab tribes fighting fiercely over domination of pastures and sources of water in the vast Arabian desert. The war motif, in pre-Islamic communities, in the Arab world, was simultaneously conflated with masculinity, toughness and the potential to take revenge against enemies and restore the honor of defeated tribes. Such attitude toward warfare was reflected in Arabic literature particularly poetry. Several pre-Islamic poetry anthologies included panegyric narratives embellishing warfare and the use of violence against external/foreign invaders and local enemies-rival Muslim tribes. Subsequently, ancient tribal conflicts, in pre-Islamic Arabia, with their brutal images of homicide and carnage were woven into the fabric of Bedouin Arab culture.

On the cultural and literary paradigms, Arab writers were undoubtedly inspired by the war heritage deeply rooted in local culture and history. War narratives in Arabic oral tradition and folklore have unconsciously or consciously played a vital role in shaping the warfare and violence discourses embedded in Arabic literature. Inevitably, contemporary Arab novelists have embarked on composing literary pieces glorifying war and its warriors particularly with regard to the Arab struggle against western colonial powers. In different narratives, the protagonists, who bring victory to their people, are unrealistically portrayed in their dedication, resolution and courage in the battlefield. Most of the Arab novelists and writers, dealing with the war issue, were striving for effect rather than for truth, consequently their representation of war was totally distorted.

For centuries, they have ignored issues such as the military's threat to freedom and brutalities committed during armed struggles. Apparently, Arab war writers and poets seemed to accept the common view, presented in the early historical epics, that victories in the battlefield provided an opportunity for attaining glory. Therefore, images of flashing trumpets, wheeling columns of troops waving swords and blaring of martial music suffuse their works. Ignoring the realistic side of war, its atrocities and barbarities, their war narratives often become a setting for the famous Arabic tales of adventures such as the love story between Antara, the black warrior of Arabia and Abla[1], the beautiful tribal idol. The Arabic war narratives also incorporate the epic and folkloric history of Abu Zaid Al-Helali Salama, the black warrior of Southern Arabia who conquered North Africa.

The entanglements of warfare, love and adventures in Arabic war narratives in addition to the impact of the ideology of patriotism and honor originated during the euphoria of the early Islamic conquests undermined the attempts of modern writers including novelists to deal with war realistically particularly fictions that delineate Arab-Arab wars. In the aftermath of the Arab defeat in the 1967 war with Israel, the Arab world was overwhelmed by a series of internal conflicts and was torn apart by Arab-Arab civil conflicts. During the 1970s and 1980s, the Arab world witnessed more socio-political setbacks and domestic conflicts including the Iraqi-Iranian war (1979-1989) and the Lebanese civil war erupting in 1975 paving the way for the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Successive Arab failures on different paradigms, besides the " intensifying process of fragmentation" characterizing modern Arab history forced novelists to use new narrative forms alien to the Arabic novel tradition (Abu-Deeb1988: 160). Therefore, modern Arab novelists -such as Hanan Al-Shaykh-depended on sophisticated western prose forms because the novel genre was not entrenched in Arab culture.

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1   The narrative is an integral part of Arabic popular culture and it is similar - in some aspects - to the love story between Othello and Desdemona in Shakespeare's tragedy.

Since Arabic literature lacks innovative prose forms compatible to their European counterparts, modern Arab novelists imported many narrative techniques from the West. Obviously, the relationship between the Arab world and the west "had provided one of the principal themes of early attempts at narrative writing in Arabic" (Allen 1995: 88).

Consequently, modern Arab writers-unlike their predecessors-have responded to the war issue from different perspectives manipulating several aesthetic strategies appropriated to fulfill their visions of war. Operating in different contexts, modern Arab novelists have attempted to reflect the complex reality of war using various techniques ranging from social realism to postmodern radical forms, which explode the entire fiction making process. Moreover, the catastrophic impact of the Lebanese civil war changed the attitude of Arab writers toward the issue of war. Due to domestic and regional geopolitical reasons, the Lebanese civil war erupted in the mid 1970's and ended in the nineties after it became chaotically absurd and meaningless. The war resulted into violence, death, disbelief, doubt, chaos, paranoia, tension, fear, shattered reality, disintegrated society and schizophrenic individuals.

The Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990)[2] was one of the most destructive armed conflicts that broke out in the twentieth century and lasted for more than a decade. In the pre-war era, Lebanon was called the Switzerland of the East, and the capital city –Beirut- was the most famous hub of art, culture, thought and philosophy in the Middle East. Beirut was a commercial, cultural and tourist center and the picturesque nature of the city captured the hearts of millions of people. The ugly sectarian war, violence and destruction dragged Lebanon backward to the Stone Era. The bloody fighting led to the fragmentation of Lebanon into provinces and areas controlled by rival militias. There are several reasons for war including that Lebanon embraces dozens of sects of Sunnis, Shiites, Maronite Christians, Orthodox, Catholics, Armenians, and Druze in addition to the existence of huge Palestinian refugee communities with different ideological and political orientations. Each of these sects wanted a Lebanon of its own according to its Sharia, laws, and principles, in addition to the numerous formations of Lebanese parties, each of which had its own militia. This was one of the reasons for the war.

However, this reason was not enough to spark the outbreak of the civil war. Rather, assassinations, bombings, and international foreign interventions exacerbated the disputes over Lebanon's ownership. All these circumstances led to the collapse of Lebanon. Subsequently, the tall buildings, huge hotels and state

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2   For more details about the Lebanese civil war, see Robert Fisk. *Pity theNation of Lebanon* (New York: Atheneum, 1990). Also Tabitha Petran. *The Struggle over Lebanon* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1987).

institutions turned into military barracks occupied by snipers and fighting groups affiliated with political parties or military organizations or warlords or religious sects. The destroyed buildings and walls pierced with bullets are testimonies narrating stories about what happened during the years of war in terms of killing, destruction, and shedding the blood of the Lebanese people. The Lebanese civil war remained a conflict of a special nature, surrounded by many ambiguities and complications The Lebanese civil war represented a real experience that took place as result of internal and external conspiracies and intrigues.

War, Violence and Trauma in *The Story of Zahra* (1980)

The events of the novel[3] take place against the background of the course of the Lebanese civil war. The novel splits into two parts: the first part, titled 'The Scars of Peace' in which Zahra, the central female character, was victimized by a brutal patriarchal society. The second part bears a subtitle: "The Torrents of war," in which Zahra becomes a completely different person, ready to take any action in order to stop the war, even if it came to establishing a relationship with a sniper, the symbol of the patriarchal war, and ended with her tragic death.

The novel's female protagonist, Zahra, a woman in her thirties, has been subjected since childhood to all kinds of oppression and discrimination in her family's sphere. Zahra suffered from the exploitation of her mother who used her as a cover to conceal a sexual affair with her lover. In fact, Zahra was tortured by the painful memories of her childhood. Her mother frequently takes her to a flat where she had sex with an unknown lover. In the presence of her father, Zahra's mother pretends that she takes the child to "the hospital of Dr. Shawky". Zahra realized that her mother does not say the truth: "I knew quite well by now that we had not gone to Dr Shawky's as my mother had said, and as she had assured me, and as I had continued to believe" (2). Later Zahra discovered the sexual affair between her mother and the stranger:

> I saw my mother rise from the sheets and the man turn his face and body away from me as he pulled on his trousers. I was suddenly surprised to see the man and my mother in the same bed. Was it because I had grown a little and could understand certain things better? Or was it because I knew that my mother and father always slept in separate beds[4]? (4)

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3   The novel pursues the harrowing story of a young girl named Zahra, who tries to escape patriarchal oppression and the horrors of. The novel was banned in many Arab countries due to political reasons. The explicit sexual discourse of the novel was condemned by the religious institutions in the Arab world.

4   All citations are taken from Hanan al-Shaykh. *The Story of Zahra* (New York: Anchor Books, 1995).

In the pre-war years, Zahra was treated badly by her mother who favored her brother - Ahmad - and considered him superior to Zahra due to gender differences: "Meat continued to be for Ahmad. Eggs were for Ahmad. Fresh tomatoes were for Ahmad. So were the fattest olives. If Ahmad was late arriving home, my mother would rumple his bed and push a pillow down under the bedclothes" (20). Likewise, Zahra was oppressed by her father, an oppressive patriarchal figure: "My father was always brutal. His appearance seemed to express his character: a frowning face, a Hitler-like moustache above thick full lips, a heavy body. Do I misjudge him? He had a stubborn personality. He saw all life in terms of black or white" (19).

Moreover, Zahra was subjected to sexual exploitation in her youth during the pre-war period. She was repeatedly raped by Malik, her brother's friend. She disobeyed her father who wanted her to marry Samir, Ahmad's friend. Instead, she became involved in an affair with a married man-Malik- who took advantage of her innocence and lack of experience. The sexual meetings in the garage resulted into the loss of Zahra's virginity, which is a taboo in the Arab world: When he first suggested the room in the garage, I tried to object. He soon convinced me. The idea of the garage was because he wished to safeguard my reputation. At our third meeting, he spoke of love, of Khalil Gibran and platonic affection. He said how much he liked my face with its pimples, how the disfigurations actually excited him, even as he lay on top of me, penetrating my virginity (24). Malik lied at her and gave her false promises of marriage: "When, afterwards, I saw the blood, the proof of my virginity, on my thighs and on the yellow coverlet, I said to him," Swear before Good that we are married" (26).

Due to her relation and illicit sexual affairs with Malik, she had two abortions. The betrayal of Malik and his refusal to marry Zahra after she lost her virginity destroyed her psychologically and she was treated from psychic trauma in a mental hospital: My own voice only returned momentarily after they had run their electric current through every cell in my body, every bone, every drop of blood (31). Afterwards, she escaped to Africa to stay with her uncle -Hashem - a political refugee who escaped from Lebanon. Unfortunately, Hashim raped his niece and later arranged her marriage to Majed, a friend and a Lebanese living in exile. In the wedding night, Majed discovered that Zahra was not a virgin. According to Cheryl Rubenberg, familial patriarchy, with its discourse of honor and shame, its relations of domination and subordination, and its myriad punishments, controls women's bodies, minds and behaviors and their entire lives[5].

In the same context, Evelyne Accad observes that "(one of the codes of Arab tribes is *sharaf* (honor), which also means the preservation of girls' virginity to

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5   Cheryl A. Rubenberg. *Palestinian Women: Patriarchy and Resistance in the West Bank* (USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001).

ensure that the women are kept exclusively for the men of their tribe." (Accad 1990: 29). Explicitly, chastity is essential for women where family and community honor is associated with female virtue, which, inevitably, leads the patriarchal society to resort to different means from gossip to honor killing to enforce the honor code to avoid the collective communal and national shame[6]. According to Nawal El Saadawi, woman was considered by the Arabs as "a menace to man and society, and the only way to avoid the harm she could do was to isolate her in the home, where she could have no contact with either one or the other" (El Saadawi 1980:136).

In this regard, Fatima Mernissi argues that the preoccupation with female virginity and chastity becomes a major obsession for men who do not hesitate to subject women to violence and abuse in an attempt to keep them in their place. "Like honor, virginity is the manifestation of a purely male preoccupation in societies where inequality, scarcity, and the degrading subjection of some people to others deprive the community as a whole of the only true human strength: Self- confidence .The concept of honor and virginity locate the prestige of a man between the legs of a woman" (Mernissi 1992: 183). In the wedding night, Majed informs the readers the following about Zahra: "It was her wedding night, and here I was penetrating her. As she still avoided meeting my eyes, I heard no cry of pain. Here I was making love to her- me the husband, she the wife. And there was no sense of a barrier to my penetration. I saw nothing: The Sheets remained white. Not even one drop of blood. Abruptly thrust her aside as she still avoided my eyes. I did not ask for a sea of blood, I would have settled for one drop, but could only cry out, as if in a trance," Cursed woman Daughter of a cursed woman!" (69).The failed woman ended up in a failed marriage with a man –Majed- she did not choose and had no feelings for him. Subsequently she was divorced and book one of the novel ended with Zahra returning to her country: "He threw me down on the couch as I went on ceaselessly screaming and moaning. I shouted," Divorce me! Divorce me!». Majed drove her to the airport dismissing her out of Africa: "As soon as he realized I was fully dressed, he dragged me out of the house and opened the door of the truck. I climbed in with difficulty, still shaking with tears and trying to hide my terror" (92).

The second book of the novel–The torrents of war- opened with Zahra coming back to Lebanon, a country on the eve of the eruption of the civil war: "l had never believed that the quiet streets I knew so well could ever change into a battlefield. But now those formerly neutral streets were suddenly filled with a spirit of revenge and tension. I could never understand how the fighters themselves, whatever side they were on, could take aim and fire in those streets. Were they all drugged, like

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6   Ibid.

Ahmad and his friends?" (121). Gradually, Zahra was engaged in war: "I could do nothing except volunteer myself at the hospital. Our neighbor's daughter and I had to walk close to the walls for fear of the sniper, hidden away on the rooftop of the near-by building" (115). This part of the novel presents the facts of Zahra's life in the midst of the civil war, where the outbreak of the armed conflict allows her to be freed from many prohibitions and a degree of freedom from social control: "When I heard that the battles raged fiercely and every front was an inferno, I felt calm. It meant that my perimeters were fixed by these walls, that nothing, which my mother hoped for me could find a place inside them. The idea of my marrying again was buried deep by the thunder and lightning of the rockets" (107).

Reading the story of Zahra as a personal history and observing the exploitation that befell her, we read at the same time the story of Zahra as a symbol corresponding to the homeland, Lebanon, which was exploited by its people. Zahra who stands for her home country means "flower" and symbolically, the novel suggests that Lebanon was a flower annihilated by a ferocious war. Here is the complete correspondence between the personality of Zahra and Lebanon, and in particular in the use of the symbolism of Zahra's abused body as equivalent to the body of the exploited homeland. Further, the narrative highlights the unification of the fate of the oppressed female and the homeland in exceptional circumstances represented by the war. Moreover, the rise of the female body in the second part of the novel becomes as a symbol of the attempt of the homeland to liberate itself from the state of chaos created by an ugly war.

Paradoxically, her feelings of fear and awe in the pre-war time disappeared after Zahra's association and sexual relationship with a sniper who is a symbol of war. This represents the resurgence of Zahra and the fragmentation of worn-out pre-war traditions: "The war goes on. Its upheavals shake up the living and the dead. How is it that death has come to rule over half the street, directing that a child will fall, a man or a woman will fall, each with a bullet in the brain, each one alive and moving, even laughing or crying, at the very moment when they walked into the sniper's sights (113)?"

In the second part of the narrative, Zahra has a long-term sexual relationship with a young man who turned to be a local sniper, stationed in her area: I could smell the heavy scent of his perspiration He put a hand on my breast and then removed it as I went on peering hard at his features in the half-light. He must have begun to undo his trousers with one hand as he started to knead my shoulder with the other. Then, in one move, he pounced on me and pushed me on to the stairs. He lifted my dress to the waist. He spread out his body on mine without even taking off my knickers. He did not seem to mind that he made my back and side hurt, and though I twisted about with discomfort, he paid no attention. He came quite quickly, shuddering briefly in his spasm of pleasure. Then he stood up, wiped

himself off at his trouser opening and began to do up the buttons. At that point I got up too, aware of the hurt in my back and side and rubbing my limbs where the bones ached. As I prepared to leave, I heard him say, tomorrow, at this time, I shall come to your apartment. I could feel a wetness on my thigh and at the edge of my knickers and wished the dripping might stop before it betrayed me "(127).

On a symbolic level, there is matching between the fate of the female subaltern and the homeland during wartime. Zahra mistakenly thinks that the only way to put an end to the destruction, which ravages Lebanon, is to be part of the war by having sexual relationship with the sniper. Therefore, sex becomes a kind of drug blinding Zahra to everything around her:

> Oh, sniper.… let me cry out in pleasure so that my father hears me and comes to find me sprawled out so. I am one with the dust in this building of death. Let my father see my legs spread wide in submission. Let every part of me submit from the dark sex between my thighs, to my breasts with their still dormant nipples, my hands able only to tremble. Here is this god of death who has scorned the loss of my virginity once, twice, a hundred times, the sniper to whom I am grateful for accepting me despite my plainness, because he realizes that beauty is not everything. I hear, close by, scattered gunshots, yet feel as if they are at a great distance. This war has made beauty, money, terror and convention all equally irrelevant. It begins to occur to me that the war, with its miseries and destructiveness, has been necessary for me to start to return to being normal and human. The war, which makes one expect the worst at any moment, has led me into accepting this new element in my life. Let it happen, let us witness it, let us open ourselves to accept the unknown, no matter what it may bring, disasters or surprises. The war has been essential. It has swept away the hollowness concealed by routines. It has made me ever more alive, ever more tranquil (137).

By the end of the novel, the sniper killed Zahra after he discovered that he got her pregnant and he had to marry her according to local customs. Symbolically, the novel presents a world in which the fate of the oppressed female unites with the fate of a society in war. The war leads to the explosion of the structure of society and the explosion of Zahra's body under torrents of bullets shot by the sniper:

> I should cross the street to where the lights from the buildings make the dark less frightening. The evening has descended. The street is empty, except at the barricades. The rain falls. I stumble. I hold on to a telegraph pole to stop some force from dragging me down. My thigh hurts. It's hurting even more. I reach down to touch the place and feel something wet run down my leg, and on to my foot. Can it be the rain? It's surely not raining so hard. Am I miscarrying? I can't even walk but must not stop. I must reach home. The pain is unbearable. I

can't go on. I fall to the ground. Fear commingles with pain, strikes into panic. I touch the source of the pain with my hand and look at what makes it sticky. In spite of the darkness I can see it is blood. A complete silence descends, for to scream has become an unbearable agony. The pain leaps to my belly and I rake the ground with my fingers. It was the sniper who put this fetus in my belly. Is he the one who now puts in all this pain as well? My vocal cords are chained to my heart's root. The sniper is killing me. He's killed me. That's why he kept me there till darkness fell. Maybe he couldn't face pulling the trigger and dropping me to the ground in broad daylight. (181)

CHALLENGING WAR AND SUBVERTING PATRIARCHY IN *THE STORY OF ZAHRA*

As one of the most impressive works in the history of Arab women's novels, *the Story of Zahra* chronicles the Lebanese civil war. Al-Shaykh[7] was undisputedly one of the most important Arab women writers who lived through the Lebanese civil war and wrote about it in English, Arabic, and French in non-heroic terms[8]. Her works revolves around "women and war, women and exile and the plight of women facing a massed weight of inhuman traditions and a heritage of male oppression" (Buck 1992: 311). Al-Shaykh's novel[9] *The Story of Zahra* splits into two books. The first book is entitled "The Scars of Peace" in which the central female character, Zahra, is silently victimized by the patriarchal structure through its variously ugly manifestations. The second book is subtitled "The Torrents of War". Here Zahra becomes a completely different character, one who is ready to do anything to stop the war, even by being involved in a relationship with a sniper, a symbol of patriarchal war. Her affair with the sniper leads to her tragic death.

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7   Hanan al-Shaykh was born in 1945 in Beirut, Lebanon. Al-Shaykh began writing at a young age and she attended the American College for Girls in Cairo, Egypt from 1963 to 1966. During her time in Cairo, she wrote her first novel, *The Suicide of a Dead Man*, published in 1971. Like most of her novels, it examined relationships between the sexes, power struggles, and patriarchal control.

8   Miriam Cooke. *War's Other Voices: Women Writers on the Lebanese Civil War* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

9   In 1976, she moved to Saudi Arabia after the eruption of the Lebanese Civil War, which inspired her next novel *The Story of Zahra*. In 1982, Al-Shaykh moved to London, and in 1989 published her famous novel *Women of Sand and Myrrh*. Also banned from many Middle Eastern countries, it follows the story of four women (two from an unnamed Arab country, one Lebanese, and one American) coping with life in a patriarchal society. In 1994, Al-Shaykh published a collection of short stories called *I Sweep the Sun off Rooftops*. The novel was translated into English in 1998. Al-Shaykh has also written two plays, *Dark Afternoon Tea* in 1995 and *Paper Husband* in 1997. Though she speaks English fluently, Al-Shaykh continues to write solely in Arabic. She still resides in London.

From the beginning of the narrative, Zahra poses as a victim to an oppressive masculine tradition, which crushes her identity. The cruel behavior of Zahra's father deepened Zahra's sense of isolation in a patriarchal society in which she feels discriminated against, unwanted, and unloved by those closest to her. To some degree, patriarchal ideas of beauty and idealized femininity are also fostered by this society. To resist these patriarchal ideas, Zahra began a process of self-mutilation as a symbolic expression of her rejection of her society and its convictions. With her fingernails, she deliberately mutilated her face until the blood was oozing from her face, to the point where it became the only reason for her getting up early every morning. Zahra lives in a society where the males seek to control the female body. The structure of the patriarchal familial culture means the privileging of the assertions of desire by males and female elders and the responsibility of girls to comply accordingly[10]. For Cheryl Rubenberg "women are not encouraged to think independently. Parents rather decide for them what "they will eat, when they will eat, what they will wear, how they can plan" (Rubenberg 2001: 82).

Zahra's father despises her because of the scars on her face. For him, she has no hope of marriage due to her physical appearance. Marriage for women is the only means of acceptance in Arab societies and if they remain unmarried, "they are, socially viewed, so much wastage. This is why mothers have always eagerly sought to arrange marriages for them" (Beauvoir 1989 :427). This is what drives Zahra's father to beat and abuse her mercilessly every time he sees her peeling pimples on her face with her fingers. In this context and on a metaphorical level, Zahra's face is no longer a part of her body, but a metaphor for society. This is because by attacking her skin, she rejects, in practice, the forcibly imposed social paradigms to which women were forced to submit. In other words, with her silent resistance, Zahra rejects all standards that underestimated women and consider them only as sexual objects.

The novelist depicts how Zahra continues to resist the oppressive patriarchal system, by taking refuge in the bathroom where she takes refuge in silence. The bathroom became her only safe haven from the stifling society in which she lived. Zahra locks herself in the bathroom, whether in Beirut or in Africa, whenever she faces psychological and mental pressure imposed on her by her tyrannical father, her uncle, and her husband-Majed. In her desperate search for her own privacy and instead of expressing her anger at her intruding uncle, she withdraws into silence in the bathroom. As Zahra locked herself in the bathroom in her uncle's house in Africa, she recalled her first unsatisfactory sexual experience in the garage with her first lover, Malik, a married co-worker at the state tobacco factory

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10   Suad Joseph. "Learning Desire: Relational Pedagogies and the Desiring Female Subject in Leba-non." *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 1:1 (2005): 79.

in Beirut. She escaped from Beirut to Africa after she suffered from mental and psychological consequences in the aftermath of her sexual affair, which ended in two abortions. Unfortunately, she faces the harsh reality again when Majid asked her to marry him, which threw her into another psychological breakdown, and the inability to confront her future husband because she is not a virgin. Africa was a political sanctuary for Hashem and other dissidents in exile, and economic opportunities for young men like Majid, but it was not a sanctuary for women –such as Zahra- who tried to escape from their oppressive patriarchal families and painful pasts. Africa has become, for Zahra, another Lebanon due to the existence of the same patriarchal values, which tyrannize and silence women.

In *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millett establishes that patriarchy is a system where male domination is achieved through ideological means. She argues that it is the patriarchal system characterized by power and dominance that oppresses women[11]. The novel reveals that as long as suppressive patriarchal culture and social mores remain in place, the transformed individual woman will be alienated[12]. The male folks in the novel "fail to acknowledge Zahra as an individual with her own personal needs"(Adams 2001: 201). Therefore, Zahra was not able to build trust in her mother and belief in women's togetherness where men "seem to matter much more than women. This could be what leads her to madness and death in the end" (Accad 1990: 45). The focus on Zahra's brother, Ahmad, as a child, reflects the ideals of patriarchy and the power of its hold on society. Zahra remembers her mother's behavior towards her brother. Her mother filled Zahra's plate with soup, and she took all her time in search of the best piece of meat for Ahmad. This masculine mentality continues to show its manifestations in the novel in Ahmad's addiction to hashish, masturbation, and objects stolen from dead bodies.

Apparently, patriarchal attitudes and practices "which privilege men, continue to permeate Arab societies from the level of the family up to the state" (Gordon 2006: 7). In the same vein, Sherifa Zuhur points out that the Arab society clings to "a patriarchal system in which women's position within and duties towards the family precede their rights as individuals" (Zuhur 2003:17). In this environment, women struggle to survive their alienation in a society, which robs them pf their human rights and erase their identity. Zahra narrates that her father ignores her, mistreats her but he wants to send Ahmad-her brother to study in America. Zahra narrates how her face and psyche are deformed by scars as result of her society's

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11   See Kate Millett. *Sexual Politics* (New York: Doubleday, 1970).

12   Miriam Cooke. "WOMan, Retelling the War Myth." *Blood into Ink: South Asianand Middle Eastern Women Write War*, ed. by Miraim Cooke and Roshini Rustomiji-Kerns (San Francisco: West view Press, 1994).

descent into the abyss of violence against women. It is noted that her father abandoned her in her early years because of the acne on her face, a symbol of her internal wounds. The conflicts within Zahra's house are reflected on her body in the shape of the pimples on her face. Zahra's extreme poverty and her deformed face due to acne vulgaris revealed her emotional wounds, but also literally explained the escalating and continuous conflict in society.

When Zahra returned to Beirut, in the second part of the novel, she suffered from severe depression, manifested in her symptoms of withdrawal and retreat, which developed into a form of complete despair and illness. With the outbreak of the civil war, Zahra's attitude changed drastically as she began to follow the news of the war. The novel reveals that war is a patriarchal invention. Men ignite the spark of a war, which burns women. Ironically, however, war changed Zahra's introverted demeanor. Zahra is no longer confined to the safety of the bathroom. Instead, she finds herself able to inhabit other places and move beyond her mother's cramped lifestyle. While others cowered with fear, Zahra plunged into the turmoil. The war forcefully brought her back to life and forced her to take action. She volunteered for a short period in one of the casualty wards, which provided her with a deeper insight into the horrific realities of war.

Zahra lives in a society where the males seek to control the female body. Zahra's father despises her because of the scars on her face. For him, she has no hope of marriage due to her physical appearance. This is what drives him to beat and abuse her mercilessly every time he sees her peeling pimples on her face with her fingers. Zahra attempted to understand the real reasons for the war as well as the urgent need for action to stop this madness. There is no doubt that her reflections on this brutal war raise important questions about the role of women in stopping it, and about the strategies to be adopted in this regard. In her continuous attempts to stop the war, she tried to prevent the shooting of civilians by asking the militiamen she knows to release them. Due to war, Zahra and her mother clung to each other during the successive bouts of street fighting between the Lebanese factions, which made Zahra cling to her mother again, like an "orange and a navel". The war brought the girl and her mother closer together than before, as they were horrified by its barbaric nature.

Throughout the second part of the narrative, the author underlines the masculine notion of war by exposing its ugly side revealing how war catastrophically damages the social fabric. The war devastated the dreams of Ahmad who wants to become an electrical engineer transforming him into an uncivilized militia member who was overwhelmed with great pride in robbing, desecrating and destroying

people's homes. The war according to Ahmad provided him with power over others, and a way to earn money by stealing and plundering. The war provided Ahmad and his comrades with work that was not available to them in the past. He is proud of his belonging to the patriarchal system, and adopts masculine values. Ahmad's words reflect the way in which war has given him and his comrades an occupation "that they did not have before and without which they would not know what to do" (Accad 1990: 53).

However, the author shows how war disintegrated Lebanese society. Recurring manifestations of this disintegration are drug abuse, loss of moral values, and disruption of traditional institutions. During war, Zahra criticized the collapse of moral values, and distanced herself from the patriarchal system in order to be able to develop the values of peace, tolerance and equality. She is aware that this war is a masculine activity, and that women are the innocent victims of war. The exclusion of women from patriarchal traditions makes them uniquely free from the greed and selfishness that those traditions have perpetuated, and more willing to criticize them. Women, being deprived of economic and social rewards in favor of the encroachment and greed accorded to men, become free to develop values essential to peace, such as cooperation, equality and creativity.

On the other hand, war provides Zahra with new roles because while war is a patriarchal construct, it also undermines masculinity and patriarchy by opening an avenue for the female protagonist to become part of it. While others cower in fear, Zahra rushes into the midst of the turmoil (Adams 2001: 201). In other words, war has suspended Zahra's persecution at the hands of her father. Consequently, the patriarchal role of the father has receded into the background. He leaves Beirut to return with his wife to the village of the ancestors, which is a clear indication of his dissatisfaction with the war. They left Zahra in Beirut, who previously would not have been allowed to live alone without the oppression of the patriarchal system. The war disrupted the traditional institutions of a patriarchal society, which oppressed women.

Elaborating on the emerging roles of women during war, Nahla Abdo argues that there is no doubt that war creates spatial re-mappings, which can provide "a space for women's emancipation by unsettling existing power structures" (Abdo 1991:22). In a related context, Virginia Woolf, in *Three Guineas*, argues that "women's exclusion from patriarchal traditions makes them uniquely free of the greed and egotism fostered by those traditions and more willing to criticize them;denied the economic and social rewards for aggression and greed granted to men,women are freer to develop values necessary for peace such as cooperation, equality, and creativity (Woolf 1966: 56). Furthermore, Nadine Puechguirbal - in her account on armed conflicts in Africa - explained that war had tremendous impact on

women and temporarily suspended patriarchal structures. She adds: "today be-
tween 60 and 80 percent of women are single heads of households. Shortages of
food, wood, water, and health care created great burdens for them. Women
and girls often have to travel long distances to find resources, inadvertently ex-
posing themselves to violence by thugs roaming the countryside" (Puechguirbal
2003: 1273).

In a similar scenario, Cynthia Enloe argues that the military has a special role
in the ideological construction of patriarchy because of the significance of com-
bat in the construction of masculine identities and in the justification of mascu-
line superiority[13]. Likewise, Paul Higate points out that militaries are perceived
as masculine institutions not only because they are populated mostly with men
but also because they constitute a major arena for the construction of mascu-
line identities[14]. Moreover, Meredith Turshen points out that "war also destroys
the patriarchal structures of society that confine and degrade women. In the very
breakdown of morals, traditions, customs, and community, war also opens up and
creates new beginnings" (Turshen 1998: 20). In this respect, Miriam Cooke says
that war had opened up new vistas, but within its own logic. It could not yet be
used to transcend it[15]. This disruption of the established moral order provides
some outlet for Zahra. She moved into a residence of her own, and was able to use
her energy for the benefit of her survival. Within the framework of this new field
created by the war, Zahra's enormous energies are perfected in emphasizing a new
set of human values, which enable her to resist the law of the jungle that Ahmad
and his generation represent.

Nevertheless, Zahra's complicated relationship with the sniper aims to stop
the war, even as she uses sexuality as a means. For Zahra, if she is unable to stop
war and death, she is able, at least, to postpone it by creating new values of love,
coexistence, and tolerance. Zahra's bare-chested walk in front of the sniper was an
attempt to distract him from his murderous missions. In other words, Zahra set
herself a moral mission, which is to come to the sniper and establish a sexual rela-
tionship with him, in the hope that these forms of communication would mitigate
the horror of the realities of war, and heal the wounds of her bereaved and shat-
tered homeland. In Zahra's relationship with the sniper, she sexualized with him
using her body as a language to humanize this "beast": I gave him my body, and
my luck in life and death." Zahra's body, wracked by a painful past, is now being

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13   For more details about masculinity and the men who wage war, please see Carol Cohen, "A Con-
      versation with Cynthia Enloe: Feminists Look at Masculinity and the Men Who Wage War."
      Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 28: 4 (2003): 1188-1207.

14   Paul R. Higate (ed.). *Military Masculinities: Identity and the State* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003).

15   Miriam Cooke. *War's Other Voices: Women Writers on the Lebanese Civil War, 1975–82* (Cambridge:
      Cambridge University Press, 1988).

used creatively for a meaningful purpose. She is now experiencing sexual pleasure for the first time, something she missed in her previous traditional relationships with Malik and with her husband, Majed.

The sexual affair between Zahra and the sniper is a symbol of Zahra's belief in peace and human values. Her desperate attempt to stop the war, by offering her body and soul to the sniper, is seen as a tool of empowerment. This is because Zahra was able through it to defend a society that is more humane and peaceful, and less barbaric than that society, governed by the ideology of authoritarian patriarchy, which destroys any hope for a better future for women. Therefore, Zahra thinks seriously about meeting the sniper to discuss their marriage in the future when the war ends. At the end of the novel, Zahra informs the sniper that she is pregnant from him, which prompts a masculine response in him and he becomes upset. Afterwards, her lover changes his mind and cunningly pretends that he will propose to her shortly. Consequently, Zahra believes that the war is over, and it is time to build a new future but her feelings only lasted for few minutes. After she departed, she felt severe pain, and found herself falling in the street, with blood oozing from her body. Zahra's tragic death, at the end of the novel, may be seen as evidence that the war did not purify the traditional patriarchal forces that legally sanction everything that oppresses women, "although the war burned with it the standards of wealth and poverty, beauty and ugliness." Perhaps this is the reason why the novelist placed the sexual encounters between Zahra and the sniper in the stairways of an abandoned building indicating the sterility and futility of this relationship, which is destined to kill any hope of a new life.

SUBVERTING THE TRADITIONAL WAR NARRATIVE

Castigating war and its horrendous impact on humanity Lloyd B. Lewis demonstrates that the image of the world that emerged in the aftermath of war is characterized by "absolute entrapment, permanent apocalypse and built-in catastrophe" (Lewis 1985: 226). Historically, war and armed struggle constituted a substantial part of Arab culture and currently, the capital cities of major Arab countries such as Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Libya and Yemen were devastated by civil wars. Moreover, violence and terrorism spilled over most of the Arab borders threatening world security. These radical transformations had their ramifications on the political and literary scenes in the Arab world. They triggered what Sabry Hafez called "new sensibility" which "was emerging in the changing social, political and cultural atmosphere" (Hafez1980: 171).

In *The Story of Zahra*, the prominent Lebanese writer Hanan al-Shaykh, underlines the violence of the Lebanese civil war technically and thematically by creating

a unique novel giving the Lebanese tragedy mythic dimensions turning it into more than a historical event. Al-Shaykh attempted to pursue the history of the civil war in Lebanon and record this painful experience in order not to fade away from national memory. Disillusioned by the geo-political scene in Lebanon and exasperated with the traditional artistic themes advocated by previous generations of war writers, Al-Shaykh introduced a complicated novel that reflects the collapse of the social, moral and political structure of her country. Due to its explicit sexuality and violent scenes of war-torn Beirut, the novel was banned in several Arab countries. In order to delineate the socio-political upheavals, internal disintegration and national fragmentation resulting from the war, the novelist incorporated taboo motifs in her canvas castigating a patriarchal society, which intensified the impacts of war.

To capture the civil war horrors, Al-Shaykh abandoned those traditional war stories, which glamorize war by the glorification of brave heroes. Instead, she underlined the urgency of a new mode, which could reflect the atrocities of real war as she witnessed it in Beirut. Thus, in her novel, Al-Shaykh rejected the linear development of character, the sense of order and progression integral to traditional war novel. The horrific scenes of the war left Lebanon in ruins. These scenes had a traumatic effect on the novelist. Haunted by the war memories for a long time, she lastly managed to overcome them by reliving the whole experience through the narrative of *The Story of Zahra*. *The Story of Zahra*. The novel, published in 1980 was one of the most famous Arab women's books of fiction that has received criticism and was translated into many languages.

In her protest against war, Virginia Woolf argues: "(We) daughters of educated men are between the devil and the deep sea. The question we put to you, lives of the dead, is how can we enter the professions and yet remain civilised human beings; human beings that is, who wish to prevent war" (Woolf 1966: 39)? Failing to cope up with the Lebanese war of attrition, Al-Shaykh, in *The Story of Zahra*, dealt with war as a metaphor of the human condition- as a reflection of such a complete inversion of the world order. She wrote within the contours of the realistic realism, but she refined the convention by incorporating within it certain innovations in style and point of view as a part of the modernist strategy of representation. Al-Shaykh made the realistic novel more introspective in order to reflect the new reality of the civil war. She considered the novel form as a substitute for the world devastated in war. In other words, her art of story-telling was an attempt to forge a fictional world in order to create some sort of order, to substitute for the one she had lost in war. The novel captures the author's fictional rendering of the annihilation and destruction of Lebanon evoking the issue of war as an inevitable consequence of moral degeneration and poses as a metaphor of a world where sectarian war senselessly massacres innocent citizens to achieve dubious political and religious ends.

The novelist, in *The Story of Zahra* succeeded, to a large extent, in creating a realistic fiction, by narrowing down the focus from a vast social canvas to the perception of a single character. In other words, Al-Shaykh abandoned the large social and political issues of war and concentrated on the impact of war on the psyche of a common lady, the protagonist of the novel, Zahra. Thus, Al-Shayk attained success within the mode of realism by shifting her attention away from a broad socio-historical perspective to the internal consciousness of a single character. The complex nature of the Lebanese civil war and its consequences were captured by Al-Shayk in *The Story of Zahra* where the fictional perspective was narrowed for the sake of fulfilling more significant purposes in connection to the psychological turmoil experienced by the protagonist. The novelist exploited the image of war as total destruction to undercut the additional heroic ideal of war prevalent in Arab culture.

Further, Al-Shaykh adopted new modes of representation reminiscent of Bakhtin's polyphonic paradigms in order to cohere the chaotic reality of the civil war. She rejected the fictional techniques of traditional war novels replacing them with new narrative polyphony in order to articulate the horrendous experience of war. In fictional literature, voices of utterances can be referred to as either homophonic (single) or poly-phonic (multiple). Mikhail Bakhtin, in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, conceives of the polyphonic novel as having a hero who becomes subject and enters into dialogue with the author and the reader, rather than an object of authorial analysis or simply a spokesperson for the author's completed monological worldview. In a related context, Bakhtin argues: "The consciousness of a character is given as someone else's consciousness, another consciousness, yet at the same time it is not turned into an object, is not closed, does not become a simple object of the author's consciousness" (Bakhtin 1984: 7). The author can create such a subject-character by representing the character not as an observed personality but as an observing and commenting consciousness. Bakhtin states: "We see not who he is, but how he is conscious of himself" (Bakhtin 1984: 99). The reader, according to Bakhtin, can experience such a visualization only if the author lets the character speak (Bakhtin 1984: 53). Although authors will no doubt inject their own voices, to some extent, at any literary work, they can prevent this incursion from overthrowing the dialogical character of the work's polyphony by giving up the last word on each character to the character himself as the author of the *Story of Zahra* does in the novel.

CONCLUSION

Evidently, Arabic-Islamic cultural heritage abounds with war literature not only narrating Arab-Muslim wars against external enemies but also comprising war narratives viewing internal Arab-Arab conflicts. Since early Arab-Arab wars and bloody sectarian conflicts, starting with the battle of Karbala'[16] in the seventh century which divided the Muslim nation into two parties – Sunnis and Shiites - domestic conflicts among Arabs never came to an end. Currently, the Arab world is torn into pieces by civil wars extending from Iraq to Yemen. The political upheavals and atrocious events triggered by the post Arab Spring era 2011, leading to the disintegration of several Arab countries and turning them into failure states, is reminiscent of the Lebanese civil war. For more than fifteen years (1975-1990), Lebanon was systematically devastated by internal armed conflicts engaging various ethnic and political factions. The war ended nowhere and Lebanon, the beautiful touristic country on the shores of the Mediterranean was reduced into a wasteland.

The novel *The Story of Zahra* is a record of a woman's rejection of the discourse of war and the patriarchy it generates. Zahra, as an oppressed woman forced into silence by the tyrannical traditions of a masculine culture, rejects these restrictions and stresses her right to express her opposition to the authoritarian patriarchal

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16   The massacre of Karbala' which took place forty-eight years after the death of Prophet Muhammad could be traced back to the antagonism between Ali, Prophet Muhammad's cousin and Moawiya, his political rival and the founder of the Umayyad Dynasty. When Othman, the third Muslim Caliph was mysteriously assassinated, Ali became the Caliph of the Muslim people but the murder of Othman and the inability to identify his killers triggered a conflict between Ali and Moawiya, the governor of Damascus, because Ali believed that Moawiya was aware of the identities of the Caliph's assassins . After the murder of Ali, Moawiya became the Calipha nd Ali's family accepted him as the leader of the Muslim nation on the condition that Moawiya's successor should be selected by the Muslim people through election. Nevertheless, Moawiya violated the agreement and appointed his corrupt son Yazid as a future Caliph. After the death of Moawiya, Yazid became the Caliph of the Muslim people. Some prominent figures from Mecca expressed rebellion against Yazid in addition to the people of Iraq who sent to Al-Hussein, inviting him to come from the Arabian Peninsula to establish a separatist Islamic State in their country. In response to their invitation Al-Hussein and about thirty of his followers including his family came from Mecca to Iraq riding horses and camels. When Al-Hussein and his company arrived at Karbala', southern of Iraq, the Iraqis betrayed him because they were intimidated by the powerful army of Abullah Ibn Zeyyad, who was appointed as the governor of Iraq by Yazid. After being besieged and prevented from food and water in Karbala', Al-Hussein was given two options, either to acknowledge Yazid as the Caliph of the Muslim people or face his army, more than thirty thousand soldiers. Al-Hussein appealed to the leaders of the enemy army to allow him to return to Mecca in peace, but his appeal was turned down. Determined not to surrender or acknowledge Yazid as the Caliph, Al-Hussein's decision to fight to the end was a suicidal mission. After being killed, the dead bodies of Al-Hussein, his families and followers were mutilated and his head was cut off and fixed on a spear and carried to be exhibited in Yazid's palace in Damascus.

system. In this regard, the novel indirectly suggests that women and men should work together towards a reformed patriotism, devoid of masculine chauvinism, war and violence. Hence, any attempt to stop it, without destroying the outrageous patriarchy, will be a weak and feeble effort carried out within a despotic patriarchal framework, as we observed in Zahra's tragic death. Finally, Zahra's actions, triggered by moral and civilized values symbolize a humanist statement in defense of peace, love and tolerance.

In a comment on *the Story of Zahra*, Isam M. Shihada argues that "the urgency to retrieve memory in many Arab women's writings becomes the impetus to retell the stories of women silenced, marginalized, and excluded by their own communities. There is no doubt that with the retrieval of memory comes the resituating of the body from its condition as an object of male desire (Shihada 2008: 177). Mona Fayad argues that with the retrieval of memory inevitably comes the resituating of the body from its condition as an object of male desire, and "its transformation into a desiring force that rejects its subjugation to a narrative of erasure" (Fayad 1995: 148). Fayad points out: "Aware that such a process of mythification places woman outside the movement of history, Arab women writers have developed a number of strategies to produce a counter-discourse to such a historical representation. Such strategy is a move to reclaim history and specificity" (Fayad 1995: 147). Further, Nawal El-Saadawi explores the same notion from a different perspective. She suggests a new approach, which incorporates a re-reading of Arab history from the of Arab women's perspective. The new reading will illustrate that the struggle of Arab women against sexual, religious and class oppression is not newly born, and that the Arab women's movement doesn't come from the void, and is not modelled on women's movements in the West, but is evident throughout the course of Arab and Islamic history, extending over fourteen centuries[17].

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Razpravljanje o vojni in patriarhalnosti: praksa smrti in nasilja v *Zahrini zgodbi*

Grozljivi prizori libanonske državljanske vojne (1975-1990), zaradi katere je bila država v ruševinah, so travmatično vplivali na celoten narod, še posebej na libanonsko pisateljico Hanan al-Shaykh, ki so jo preganjali grozljivi spomini na vojno, dokler jih ni premagala s podoživljanjem celotne izkušnje v svojem izjemnem romanu *Zahrina zgodba*. Razočarana nad političnim dogajanjem med vojno in razburjena nad tradicionalnimi umetniškimi temami, ki so jih zagovarjale prejšnje generacije vojnih pisateljev, je al-Shaykhova zavrnila linearni razvoj lika, občutek reda in napredka, ki so bili sestavni del vojne literature v arabskem svetu. Namesto tega je z ustvarjanjem edinstvenega romana prikazala grozote vojne, libanonski tragediji dala mitske razsežnosti in jo spremenila v več kot le zgodovinski dogodek.

Ključne besede: Hanan al-Shayk, vojna, Libanon, patriarhalnost

Ignorance is Bliss: Aphra Behn's Paradise Lost Featuring Black Characters Falling from African Heaven

Nazan Yıldız

Abstract

This article reads Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko: or, the Royal Slave* (1688) as a rewriting of the paradise story of Adam and Eve largely identified with John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) by literary circles. Meeting the true colours of civilization via slavery, the paradisal innocence of Oroonoko and Imoinda grows into a horrible experience that brings their downfall from African paradise, similar to Adam and Eve losing their innocence for the sake of knowledge. Drawing on the principles of primitivism, Behn emblematicizes a black Adam and Eve as representatives of mankind which subverts colonial and patriarchal discourses all in the same breath. In this respect, the article asseverates that *Oroonoko* serves as a microcosm of humanity at large which delineates the unremitting war between nature and civilization, and innocence and experience, as foregrounded in recent ecological studies, as well as men and women.

Keywords: Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko*, *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve, primitivism

Little Lamb, who make thee
Dost thou know who made thee,
Gave thee life, and bid thee feed

"The Lamb", *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, William Blake

APHRA BEHN: A WORDMONGER OF CONTROVERSY AND A FEMINIST ICON

Aphra Behn (1640–1689) was born into a society that was fraught with political strife and religious conflict as England was torn apart by the Civil War and the Stuart exile. Political and social unrest characterized the seventeenth century, which is remembered for the establishment of a republic, Charles I's death, years of war, horror, and carnage as well as the Crown's strict pressure over the state. Within this calamitous period, Behn enjoyed her greatest literary success during the Restoration (1660–1700). Perhaps as a result, the ideals of the monarchy and nobility are recurrently embraced in her oeuvre (Duffy 20). The Restoration Era, to which Behn belonged, was characterized by a resurgence of drama and literature produced roughly between 1660 and 1690, when, in contrast to earlier times, women like Aphra Behn were given a greater platform in the theatre. Plays and poetry by Aphra Behn that addressed gender and sexuality were allowed to be publicly issued. Like her male colleagues, Aphra Behn wrote openly and unprecedentedly about sex, while facing a lot of criticism. She was highly esteemed for her wit and talent, and in 1666, King Charles II hired her for secret duty in the Netherlands. She was unpaid and temporarily jailed for debt, so she started writing for money. Behn wrote verse tragicomedies in her early career. She wrote her first play, *The Forc'd Marriage*, in 1670. A year later, *The Amorous Prince* debuted. *Abdelazer*, her only tragedy, was performed in 1676. During the 1670s, she became more and more interested in farce and light comedy. Numerous ingenious and lively comedies, such as *The Rover* (which was staged in two parts in 1677 and 1681), were profitable ventures. The 1687 premiere of *The Emperor of the Moon* served as a model for the harlequinade, a type of comedic theatre that later gave rise to the English pantomime. Behn also adapted plays written by more established dramatists. She was Britain's most prolific playwright in the 1670s and 1680s, surpassed only by Poet Laureate John Dryden (Hutner 18). Behn was accepted as a member of the Earl of Rochester's circle and made acquaintances with many of the leading writers of the day, such as John Dryden, Elizabeth Barry, John Hoyle, Thomas Otway, and Edward Ravenscroft. The King usually attended the stagings of her plays. At the King's court, *The Rover* quickly gained popularity. It examined issues including gender roles, the distinction between desire and love,

and the use of deception as cover and had an extraordinary success. As theatre revenues dropped in the 1680s, Behn turned her attention from composing plays to novel writing, which soon turned into an increasingly lucrative endeavour. Behn composed poetry, too, the majority of which was included in *Poems upon Several Occasions*, encompassing *Lycidus; or, The Lover in Fashion* (1688) and *A Voyage to the Island of Love* (1684) (Hughes and Todd 1-10).

Even though Behn wrote a large number of plays, her fiction is more popular today. Among Behn's works of fiction were *The Fair Jilt* (1688) and the compound epistolary novel *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1684-87). *Oroonoko: or, the Royal Slave* (1688), the most treated of Behn's novels, tells the story of a Coramantien-born African prince who is forced into slavery and later encounters the narrator in Surinam. *Oronooko* is particularly noteworthy for exploring slavery, race, and gender, which were the central concerns of the time, as well as for succeeding Behn in an outstanding position for the growth of the English novel. Although Behn, above and beyond *Oroonoko*, is the writer of at least 14 pieces of prose fiction, 21 plays, and a sizable collection of verse, she still might be acknowledged as an underappreciated author along with receiving unfair criticism. As Gilbert and Gubar state in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, "like some real-life Duessa" Behn "was gradually but inexorably excluded (even exorcized) not only from the canon of serious literature but from the parlours and libraries of respectability" (63). Accordingly, there is a startling lack of agreement about the kind and scope of her accomplishments, most especially of *Oroonoko*. Robert Adams Day, to exemplify, calls *Oroonoko*'s narrative techniques "entirely original" and acclaims its "astonishing innovations" (373). Yet, an all-inclusive study of Behn's work by Frederick M. Link takes her fiction to be clichéd and comes to the conclusion that she "made no significant contribution to the development of the [novel] form" (151). Ian Watt, in *The Rise of the Novel*, in the same vein, ignores Behn's contribution to the novel genre and makes only two brief references to her (20, 36). Additionally, there is no consensus on the subject matter of *Oroonoko*. For instance, it has been criticized for displaying either a high royalist outlook or republican preconceptions.[1] Janet Todd encapsulates the disagreement about Behn as such: she "has a lethal combination of obscurity, secrecy, and staginess, which makes her an uneasy fit for any narrative, speculative or factual" (19). Despite the controversies over *Oroonoko*, Behn, beyond dispute, broke down boundaries and acted

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1   About this argument, see, among others, W. J. Cameron, *New Light on Aphra Behn*. Auckland, 1961, 20; George Guffey, "Aphra Behn's Oroonoko: Occasion and Accomplishment," in *Two English Novelists: Aphra Behn and Anthony Trollope*. Ed. George Guffey and Andrew Wright. Los Angeles, 1975, esp. 16-17, and Laura Brown, "The Romance of Empire: Oroonoko and the Slave Trade," in *The New Eighteenth Century: Theory / Politics / English Literature*. Ed. Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown. New York, 1987. 41-61.

as a literary spirit for the succeeding posterity of women writers since she was one of the first English women to make a career via her writing. Playwrights like Delarivier Manley, Mary Pix, and Catherine Trotter addressed Behn as their most important forerunner and the one who first gave women authors a platform after her passing. Feminist critics and authors, Maureen Duffy, Angeline Goreau, Ruth Perry, Moira Ferguson, Jane Spencer, Elaine Hobby, and Janet Todd, among others, re-examined Behn's literary works, her writings were reprinted, and she was revived as a prominent female author. Behn's oeuvre presents one of the strongest literary rebuttals against the male-dominated eighteenth-century English literature circle. The legacy of Behn is echoed in Virginia Woolf's vocables in *A Room of One's Own* (1929):

> All women together, ought to let flowers fall upon the grave of Aphra Behn [...] for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds [...] Behn proved that money could be made by writing at the sacrifice, perhaps, of certain agreeable qualities; and so by degrees writing became not merely a sign of folly and a distracted mind but was of practical importance. (113–114)

A playwright, poet, prose writer, and translator, Behn, as construed from Woolf's statements, gave women writers a chance to tell their own stories and recognition in the literary realm. Behn is, indisputably, served as the chief guiding spirit for past and present women writers, particularly for Jane Austen, George Eliot, and the Brontè Sisters, who tried to gain a place in the male-dominated literary world with the pseudonyms they had to take in order to publish their works during the Victorian era, the golden age of the novel, where Woolf was also endeavouring to exist both as a woman and a writer. In fact, Behn, who repeatedly expressed her concerns about being able to write the story of a noble hero in *Oroonoko* as a reminder of her drain similar to a Victorian woman writer, is the very predecessor of today's female poet laureates such as Carol Ann Duffy, Mona Van Duyn and Rita Dove.

OROONOKO, ITS CRITICAL RECEPTION, AND PRIMITIVENESS

One of the first English novels, Behn's *Oroonoko* was published in 1688 and is hailed as "the first humanitarian novel in English" (Cross 20). Although it combines the genres of mythology, reportage, travelogue, and memoir, -hybrid work- *Oroonoko* is categorized as a novel. Current criticism of Behn's *Oroonoko* has sought to address its politically and ideologically aware commitments; its genre,

its historical authenticity, its contribution to the emergence of the novel,[2] its justification of anti/feminism, its delineation of slavery, race, and the exotic Other alongside the English colonial ambition of the seventeenth-century, which in sundry ways helped to throw light on the contemporary world.[3] Set in Coramantien on the African coast and in an English colony in Surinam, *Oroonoko* narrates the tale of a black African prince who is taken into slavery. Only one English work before *Oroonoko* featured a black hero, William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice*, 1603. Behn's work, in contrast to *Othello*, works through primitivism, noteworthy to the purpose of the paper, too, with a positive lens on black people. Primitivism suggests that individuals in a primitive civilization have higher standards of morality and ethics than civilized people; hence, it is a nostalgic yearning for a bygone era of idealized living (Hirsch 485). Likewise, in many ways, Montaigne claims in *Of The Cannibals*, primitive people are superior to Europeans and despite their lack of social order, they are less cruel than Europeans (205). Montaigne's assertion comes into existence in Behn's words for the natives in *Oroonoko* as such:

> […] they knowing all the places where to seek the best food of the country and the means of getting it; and for very small and invaluable trifles, supply us with what it is impossible for us to get, for they do not only in the wood, and over the savannahs, in hunting, supply the parts of hounds by swiftly scouring through those almost impassable places, […] in the water, one would think they were gods of the rivers, […] And then for shooting, what they cannot take or reach with their hands, they do with arrows, and have so admirable an aim that they will split almost an hair. (15)

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2   Despite some counter-arguments, Behn's *Oroonoko* occupies a peerless seat in the development of the English novel. Romances were quite popular prior to *Oroonoko*'s debut. They typically included allegorical and type characters alongside fictitious settings of remote places and supernatural happenings. *Oroonoko*, yet, has local colour and touches of reality through its narrator's first-hand experience based on Behn's real stay in Surinam specifically by her accounts of tribal customs, justice, slave trading, clothing, and hunting as a reliable witness of a distant land. As Johnson puts it, in *Oroonoko*, "Behn did pioneer service, actually blazing the trail for the eighteenth-century realistic novelists, and the humanitarian writers that followed some years later. Here was a woman, who had the courage, at a time when the historical romances were enjoying a great vogue, to write a novel whose characters were real and whose setting was not in an imaginative country, but a real one" (335).

3   See among many others, Ernest Bernbaum, "Mrs. Behn's Oroonoko," in *Anniversary Papers by Colleagues and Pupils of George Lyman Kittredge.* Boston, 1913; Ruthe, T. Sheffey, "Some Evidence for A New Source of Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*," *Studies in Philology* 59 (1962): 53-57; Anita Pacheco, "Royalism and Honor in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 34. 3 (1994): 491-506; Susan Z. Andrade, "White Skin, Black Masks: Colonialism and the Sexual Politics of Oroonoko," *Cultural Critique* 27 (1994):189-214, and Laura J, Rosenthal, "*Oroonoko*: Reception, Ideology, and Narrative Strategy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*. Ed. Derek Hughes and Janet Todd. Glasgow, 2004, 151-165.

Pursuant to Henry David Thoreau's statement that humans should be a part of nature rather than a part of civilization ("Walking" /1851), to the narrator, Oroonoko and his people, who live in unity with nature, are more advanced than civilized Europeans. Thoreau's appreciation of nature introduces novel ideas that tackle the main ecological issues underscoring the clash between nature and civilisation as primitivism does. Although civilization is acknowledged as an advanced stage of human beings that have attained a high level of government, industry, science, and culture, nature is the world as it would be without humans and civilization. As ecological studies and ecocriticism document, numerous "civilised" human activities, such as pollution, deforestation, combustion of fossil fuels, and overpopulation, have a bearing on the physical environment. These kinds of changes have led to undrinkable water, low-quality air, erosion of soil, and global warming. That is how the discrepancy between nature and civilisation ties primitivism to ecological studies.[4] The key period for the emergence of primitivism was the Age of Discovery (15th c.–17th c.) when European travellers came upon a different culture of the peoples of Asia and the Americas, Africa and Australasia, and the idea of colonialism that came with it. By contrasting urban European civilization with the uncivilized man living in accord with nature, as Diamond notes, philosophers of the Age of Enlightenment were prompted to query medieval conventions about the nature of man, society, and nature. They also questioned the class structure of civilized society and the intellectual and moral edifices of Christianity (159). Primitivism, additionally, stands completely against Eurocentrism and supposedly inferior East and superior West found its expression in the widely known dichotomy of *us* and *them*, or, as Edward Said suggests in *Orientalism* (1978), in the construction of Orient and Oriental discourse. Primitivism subverts the conviction that non-European peoples as the Other embodied the opposition of the European Self which has its roots in the Middle Ages, when Black and White in conjunction with Christians and Non-Christians were separated along the lines of race, religion, and culture. This

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4   Apart from ecology, the concept of the Anthropocene is definitely at the centre of environmental debates. The antithesis of primitivism, the term Anthropocene (anthropo (human) cene (new, age)) was coined in 2000 by Nobel Prize-winning scientist Paul Crutzen to characterize the human-centred era. This geological period dates back to 1784 when the steam turbine was discovered. This is the time when it is acknowledged that humans altered the natural order of the planet and brought about unfavourable alterations to the climate and geology. In this era, humanity's impact on the environment and geology was mostly immeasurable, but it started to have a significant detrimental impact. Around this time, human activity extended so widely and became so powerful that it began to challenge the powers of nature. Will Steffen, Paul J. Crutzen, and John R. McNeill, "The Anthropocene: Are Humans Now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature?", Ambio, 38, 2007, 614. For more information on the Anthropocene see Bronislaw Szerszynski, "The End of the End of Nature: The Anthropocene and the Fate of the Human", *Oxford Literary Review*, 34/ 2, 2012, 165-84.

clash between colonialism and primitivism manifested itself in literature such as, among others, in the writings of Charles Dickens, Herman Melville, Joseph Conrad, Bartolomè de las Casas, Chinua Achebe, and R. K. Narayan.

Primitivism has taken its place in the accounts of explorers, too. According to Amerigo Vespucci's explanation, the Brazilian Indians were physically excellent and had a great deal of liberty (Franco 566). Christopher Columbus, likewise, believed that he had found the West Indies to be the long-lost Eden (Sanford 23). The narratives of the travels served as inspiration for works of literature such as Erasmus's *The Praise of Folly* (1509) and Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1526). Primitivism goes hand in hand with the concept of the Noble Savage which came into sight in the explorations of the eighteenth century. The idea of the Noble Savage dates back to ancient Greece when Homer, Pliny, and Xenophon romanticized the Arcadians and other primal peoples. Later, Roman authors like Horace, Virgil, and Ovid treated the Scythians similarly. The Noble Savage refers to a type of character who is uncontaminated by civilization. It, then, signifies the innate goodness and moral superiority of primitive people (Cudon 560-561) including the populaces of Africa and the Americas that had not been Christianised and interacted with Western civilization. Thereafter, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, most frequently credited with shaping the modern notion of the Noble Savage, expanded on the ideas of the term to idealise the primordial man as the supreme person whose behaviour should serve as an example for modern people and nations. To Rousseau, human beings are innately tranquil, and serenity and equality are embodied by people living in nature who are also socially egalitarian. As Rousseau specifies: "Men in a state of nature do not know good and evil, but their independence, along with the peacefulness of their passions, and their ignorance of vice keep them from doing ill" (71). In English literature, the term Noble Savage first came into view in John Dryden's *The Conquest of Granada* (1672), and it was afterward used in Behn's novel *Oroonoko* (1688). In *Atala* (1801), *René* (1802), and *Les Natchez* (1826), François-René de Chateaubriand glamorized the North American Indian, as in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Leatherstocking Tales* (1823–41), which includes the noble chief Chingachgook and his son Uncas. Other illustrations, among others, contain the three harpooners of the ship Pequod in Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851), Queequeg, Daggoo, and Tashtego.

ADAMIC PRIMITIVENESS AND BEHN'S LOST AFRICAN PARADISE

In the eighteenth century, Western artists and scholars entered into "the conscious search in history for a more deeply expressive, permanent human nature and cultural structure in contrast to the nascent modern realities" by probing the values of the primal people (Diamond 215). The purported hallmarks of primitiveness are listed as follows: (1) liberty and absence of social grouping; (2) lack of private goods and money; (3) nakedness and carnal leniency; (4) lack of conformism; and (5) social equality (Franco 565-66). To the early Christians, the Adamic period encompassing the listed traits above was the golden age of primitivism. This period referred to Adam before the fall, who was viewed as an emblem of human perfection (Boas 3). For Christians, the first few chapters of Genesis paint a picture of a marvellously good creation in which people co-existed peacefully and in harmony with God and one another. Christians have maintained that the first human couple's consumption of the forbidden fruit caused sin and conflict in humanity. Christian theology has relied heavily on this story of a good beginning, a terrible Fall, and a resolution of cosmic reunion in Christ (Kvam 4).

   To give details, Adam and Eve were living in a state of innocence before they ate the forbidden fruit and fell from grace. In Augustine's account, the wrong-doing of Adam and Eve, our proto-parents, whose tragic act of eating from the tree of good and evil resulted in their everlasting banishment from Eden, caused mankind to be deprived of paradisiacal happiness. For Augustine, due to the original sin, ever since Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which he had commanded them to avoid, they and their descendants have been fated to live a life of wretchedness and agony in the world. To Augustine, in addition to eradicating all kinds of human purity via their tragic fall, Adam and Eve also acquired the genes for human wickedness, which have since been passed down through the ages (Otten 47–48). In the early twentieth century, in contrast to Augustine, Biblical scholars like Hermann Gunkel and S.R. Driver proposed that the story of Paradise (Genesis 2–3) was, in fact, a myth that represented a crucial stage in human history, that is, the loss of childhood, inexperience, and innocence (11; 96). In like manner, to Mary Daly, the main message of the story of Paradise is the necessity to wake from the state of innocence and ignorance (67). In this perspective, as Korte suggests, the story depicts the change from a less developed and dependent state to an essential phase of adult life. The experience of Eve and Adam—yearning for the banned, making autonomous decisions, and blushing with shame—is construed by the growth model as a sign of personal and social growth that elevates and distinguishes the

relationship between people and God, not as a sign of "sin" or "apostasy". This makes disobeying God's laws an essential step for spiritual development, peaceful coexistence with others, and a cultivated connection with God (150). However, this divergence from God and innocence to a more progressive level, so to speak, closer to knowledge and civilization, results in disaster and expulsion from paradise for Adam and Eve, as it is for Oroonoko and Imoinda from African paradise in *Oroonoko*.

Oroonoko, based on Behn's memories of Surinam, tells the story of an African prince. Right at the beginning of the novel, following primitivism, natives are portrayed by the narrator as friends to English: "for those we live with in perfect amity, without daring to command them, but on the contrary caress them with all the brotherly and friendly affection in the world" (12). Describing the clothing of natives, the narrator draws direct parallelism between them and Adam and Eve: "The beads they weave into aprons about a quarter of an ell long, and of the same breadth, working them very prettily in flowers of several colours of beads; which apron they wear just before them, as Adam and Eve did the fig-leaves, the men wearing a long strip of linen, which they deal with us for" (13). This nakedness is an emblem of innocence away from sin as in the case of Adam and Eve in the stage of innocence. As documented in Genesis, before the fall, Adam and Eve were created "naked" (Genesis 2:25, NIV) and they "felt no shame" (verse 25, NIV). The Creator had put a garment of light around Adam and Eve, a robe symbolic of His own character, which was perfectly reflected in them, so they didn't need to wear material clothes. Simply put, they had no reason to be ashamed. They did not know what shame was because they had no sin in their ethics. After the Fall, when Adam and Eve ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, "the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked" (Genesis 3:7, NIV). As soon as they came to know sin, their intellectual eyes were unlocked and they saw that they were no longer innocent. Their innocence was tarnished by shame and remorse and they fell from paradise. As another example, the narrator, after extolling their physical features, gives the characteristics of natives by accentuating their innocence analogous to Adam and Eve:

> They are extreme modest and bashful, very shy and nice of being touched. And though they are all thus naked, if one lives forever among them, there is not to be seen an indecent action or glance; and being continually used to see one another so unadorned, so like our first parents before the Fall, it seems as if they had no wishes. (13-14)

Apart from the innocence of the natives, Behn's delineation of Africa is similar to the description of heaven parallel to Genesis, also depicted by John Milton in *Paradise Lost*.[5] The narrator of *Oroonoko* designates and exalts African heaven as such:

> It is a continent whose vast extent was never yet known, and may contain more noble earth than all the universe besides […] It affords all things both for beauty and use; it is there eternal Spring, always the very months of April, May and June. The shades are perpetual, the trees, bearing at once all degrees of leaves and fruit, from blooming buds to ripe Autumn, groves of oranges, lemons, citrons, figs, nutmegs and noble aromatics, continually bearing their fragrancies. (52-53)

In a similar vein, the narrator alludes to a paradise garden when describing a grove beside a river. Even in the hottest part of summer, people can find calm and tranquillity in this grove, which is home to a variety of rare fruits and flowers:

> […] towards the river, was a walk or grove of orange and lemon trees, […] whose flowery and fruity branches meet at the top and hindered the sun, […] and the cool air that came from the river made it not only fit to entertain people in, at all the hottest hours of the day, but refreshed the sweet blossoms, and made it always sweet and charming, and sure the whole globe of the world cannot show so delightful a place as this grove was. (54)

As another example, the narrator, after extolling their physical features, gives the characteristics of natives by accentuating their innocence analogous to Adam and Eve: "[…] though they are all thus naked, if one lives forever among them, there is not to be seen an indecent action or glance; […] like our first parents before the Fall […] these people represented to me an absolute idea of the first state of innocence, before man knew how to sin" (13-14). In their justice system, there is no "fraud", "vice or cunning" yet they were "taught by the white men" (14), that is by civilization. These features are used throughout the text to verify the superiority

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5   In *Paradise Lost*, Milton describes heaven full of life for humans, animals and plants: "Now Morn her rosy steps in th' eastern clime/Advancing, sowed the earth with orient pearl,/When Adam waked, so customed, for his sleep/Was airy light, from pure digestion bred,/And temperate vapors bland, which th' only sound/Of leaves and fuming rills, Aurora's fan,/ Lightly dispersed, and the shrill matin song/Of birds on every bough; so much the more" (V. 94-101). Moreover, unlike Joseph Conrad's Africa, in *Heart of Darkness* (1899), repetitively compared to hell that God deserts, and where no civilization is traced, in Behn's text, the pure nature of Africa equals paradise as in Abdulrazak Gurnah's account of the garden of Aziz in *Paradise* (1994), enthused by different gardens in heaven mentioned in the Qur'an: "The quadrants were planted with trees and bushes, some of them in flower: lavender, henna, rosemary and aloe. In the open ground between the bushes were clovers and grasses, and scattered clumps of lilies and irises. […] the ground rose into a terrace planted with poppies, yellow roses and jasmine" (42-43).

of the natives over the English as in the case between the natives and the British governor. When the British governor did not keep his promise to the natives, they thought he was dead and mourned because there was no such thing as breaking a commitment in their society. They asked the governor what to term a man who broke his word when they found out that he was still alive. The governor calls that person a "liar" "which was a word of infamy to a gentleman"; then one of the natives responded: "Governor, you are a liar, and guilty of that infamy" (14).

What is more, the prince of these noble natives, Oroonoko, like Adam, possesses the beauties of all humanity. First of all, similar to Adam's depiction in the image of God in literary works (Boas 3), Oroonoko is likened to a "deity" (38, 73) in Behn's text. He is "pretty tall, but of a shape the most exact that can be fancied; […] "from head to foot" (18). Despite spending most of his short life in wars, this brave native's knowledge of "humanity", "greatness of soul", "notions of true honour", and absolute generosity" (17) fascinate the narrator. Furthermore, similar to Gabriel teaching Adam, Oroonoko is taught by a French tutor in "morals, language and science" (17). Oronoko knows English, French, and Spanish. His education is no different from those in Europe by "the most refined schools of humanity and learning" (18). Her partner, Imoinda, as Eve was to Adam, is fully equal to Oroonoko by both her physical and character beauty: [S]he [is] female to the noble male, the beautiful black Venus to our young Mars, as charming in her person as he, and of delicate virtues (18). Holmesland describes their love as "heavenly" since they are "the counterparts of the Prince and Lady Happy as Neptune and a sea goddess" (227). Imoinda is the ideal woman, as Ferguson notes, in whom "physical beauty and moral purity merge in a well-nigh perfect combination" (349). She is so gorgeous that, analogous to Eve whose beauty makes the serpent-dressed devil forget his evil purpose in Milton's *Paradise Lost*,[6] even white men are after her. More's a pity, that when this seamless couple is about to unite, their paths diverge bitterly because of the covetous aging king's plan, who sets his eye on Imoinda.

A tougher test awaits Oroonoko, who is in so much pain after the fake demise of his Imoinda. Radically tearing down the traditional account of the paradise story documented in the Bible and Milton's text,[7] in Behn's paradise, it is not Imoinda (Eve), but Oroonoko (Adam), who is deceived by the promise of wisdom. Similar to the devil veiled as a serpent, who deceives Eve that God wants to keep

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6   Eve's beauty is defined as "more delicious then those Gardens feign'd /Or of reviv'd Adonis, or renownd Alcinous" (IX.240-41).

7   These are the words of the devil to Eve to deceive her to eat from the fruit: "O Sacred, Wise, and Wisdom-giving Plant,/ Mother of Science, Now I feel thy Power/ Within me cleere, not onely to discerne/ Things in thir Causes, but to trace the ways/Of highest Agents, deemd however wise" (IX. 374-78).

her ignorant but he proposes her wisdom, the European captain, disguised in civilization, cheats Oroonoko with his knowledge and education, and promises him wisdom. Analogous to the devil's several attempts to deceive Eve, the slave-trading captain, "a man of a finer sort of address and conversation" (38) repeatedly invites Oroonoko to his ship. Enthralled by his education, knowledge, and intellectual speeches, Oroonoko finally accepts the invitation, gets on the ship, and is bewitched by "richly adorned with carpets and velvet cushions, […] music and trumpets, […] [and] all sorts of fine wines" (38). The captain, yet, deceives him, takes him prisoner, and sells him as a slave. Oroonoko, who is deceived under the pretext of civilization, realizes the real face of the white man and civilization, but it is too late. Even though this deception brings him back to his Imoinda who is alive but sold as a slave, it turns into a catastrophe for the couple bringing their end. Oroonoko and his wife Imoinda are promised independence by the white man, but they never deliver on it. Due to his royal status, Oroonoko is exempt from the typical hardships of slavery, but he still yearns to be freed. A problem over the future of their child is introduced by Imoinda's pregnancy. Oroonoko launches a revolt to obtain their freedom, but it is put down. He is tortured by the English despite their pledge of mercy. In a fit of rage and desperation, Oroonoko kills Imoinda to keep her from being raped and, presumably, from giving birth to other slaves. However, because of his grief at Imoinda's passing, he is unable to exact revenge.

The colonial rulers horribly dismember Oroonoko till he dies; his adversaries split apart his body. That is how Oroonoko and Imoinda fall from African heaven that is embodied in nature which is, in Behn's terms, "the most harmless, inoffensive and virtuous mistress" and a better instructor "than all the inventions of Man" which terminate the "tranquillity they[natives] possess by ignorance" (14). Behn's words, her preference for nature to civilization for humanity's own good, is resounded in Adam's words to Eve after the fall in Milton's *Paradise Lost*: "since our Eyes/Op'nd we find indeed, and find we know/Both Good and Evil, Good lost, and Evil got, /Bad Fruit of Knowledge, if this be to know,/Which leaves us naked thus, of Honour void,/Of Innocence, of Faith, of Puritie,/Our wonted Ornaments now soild and staind," (IX. 599-605). As Adam states, eating the fruit of knowledge opens their eyes, but they lose their honour and innocence. All in all, yearning for wisdom and knowledge deprives Adam and Eve, and Oroonoko and Imoinda of innocence and paradise. Counter to the traditional story, in Behn's story, Imoinda is completely innocent and becomes the victim of men, including Oroonoko. Thus, Behn upends both the oldest myth of humanity and its most noted scapegoat. Undoubtedly, this fits well with Behn's position as a female writer and the legacy she left to women.

CONCLUSION

Primitive people, by the colonial and Eurocentric discourse, have been largely observed as pure savages who would become humans by means of white man's civilisation. In recent years, yet, people have seemed to be overcome by civilization and its repercussions as manifested mainly in ecological studies in copious fields. With the dread of the future, human beings, day by day, realise how they give up all for progress and long for the past. Due to men's deeds for the sake of development, the heavenly world has turned into a dystopia in the twenty-first century abounding with the revulsions of tyranny and war alongside earthquakes, floods, and epidemics. The examination of the current plight of human beings requires a closer look at the past, even at the oldest story of our ancestors, Adam and Eve, and their allegorical roles as a light for humankind. My reading of Behn's *Oroonoko* as a rewriting of paradise story reveals how we, running after civilization, make our end by our own deeds, as if it is the meaning of being Adam and Eve. More radically, in opposition to colonial and patriarchal treatises, in Behn's story of paradise, the exotic Other turns into a black Adam and Eve as the representatives of humanity, and by making Oroonoko (Adam), instead of Imoinda (Eve), the one deceived in the name of accessing knowledge, Behn almost saves women from a lifetime stain. As the last word, Behn's paradise story in *Oroonoko* is a humanist pronouncement against colonial and racial convictions, a matriarchal declaration that turns upside down the traditional apple story and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, considered a patriarchal manifesto, and finally an ecological assertion upholding the superiority of nature over civilization, rendering Behn a writer who deserves a second and through look.

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Nevednost je blaženost: izgubljeni raj Aphre Behn s črnskimi liki, ki padajo iz afriških nebes

Članek obravnava delo Aphre Behn *Oroonoko: or, the Royal Slave* (1688) kot predelavo rajske zgodbe o Adamu in Evi, ki jo literarni krogi večinoma enačijo z *Izgubljenim rajem* Johna Miltona (1667). Rajska nedolžnost Oroonoka in Imoinde, ki se v suženjstvu sreča s pravimi barvami civilizacije, preraste v grozljivo izkušnjo, ki jima prinese padec iz afriškega raja, podobno kot sta Adam in Eva izgubila nedolžnost. Na podlagi načel primitivizma Behn simbolizira črnska Adama in Evo kot predstavnika človeštva, ki v isti sapi spodkopavata kolonialni in patriarhalni diskurz. V tem pogledu članek potrjuje, da Oroonoko služi kot mikrokozmos človeštva nasploh, ki razmejuje nenehno vojno med naravo in civilizacijo ter nedolžnostjo in izkušnjo, kot je v ospredju nedavnih ekoloških studij in tudi med moškimi in ženskami.

Ključne besede: Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko*, *Izgubljeni raj*, Adam in Eva, primitivizem

Psychoanalytic Reflections on Phallocentrism and Colonialism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

Emre Say

Abstract

This article discusses revelations of patriarchal along with colonial discourse and practice as poignantly adumbrated to coalesce and interact in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. In this respect, the misogynistic representation of female characters who are sketched as insubstantial mystified stereotypes in a heterosexist men's world constitutes an important aspect of the narrative. Besides, the connotative depiction of the river – characterized by an antagonistic aura ascribable to the hinted juxtaposition of the Congo and the Thames – as a symbolically evocative topographical element encourages keen reflection. Last but not least, the implication of language as an influential instrument serving to the endorsement of colonialist as well as patriarchal causes is worth exploring from a psychoanalytic perspective featured by feminist sensitivity.

Keywords: psychoanalysis, Freud, patriarchy, misogyny, colonialism, Conrad, Congo

As can be gathered from Freud's assertion regarding the regressive drive suffusing human nature in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, each human being in flesh and blood descends from Wholeness. This Wholeness corresponds to a pre-prenatal stage of impersonal existence which can be argued to manifest itself as individual's quest for oceanic feeling in Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*. At this phase of existence there exists no inner border within the scope of this presumably unbounded realm called Wholeness. Then among myriads of sperms, a particular one chances to fertilize the ovary and thereby an assiduously interwoven, unerring, intricate process of procreation is initiated at the close of which among billions of 'possibilities', one particular 'possibility' materializes into the concrete stage of existence in flesh and blood earmarked by either a vagina or a penis. The presumably lucky(?) one that is obliged to mutate into materiality as either female or male is actually simply a tiny speck of crumble whisked off the primordial domain of intact and engulfing Wholeness. Following the arbitrary process of conception, the "possibility" decreed to be transformed into distinct physical existence gradually begins to assume an individualistic, yet still deterministic, aspect in accordance with one's sex. In this respect, the relationship of female infant with mother perceptibly varies from the one between male infant and mother. Whereas conventionally female infant is considered to tend to establish a more peacefully-dispositioned relationship with her mother's physical domain which is a tangible and microcosmic embodiment of primordial Wholeness; male infant's relationship with his mother's body involves an innate prospect of projecting a hostile, violence-oriented, and greedy mainstream inclination on male infant's disposition as he grows out from childhood into adolescence and eventually adulthood. The 'essential' factor that foments the rise of tension between male infant and that primordial Wholeness as identified with primarily mother's body and later on female body as a generic sexual domain is phallus the usurper. Male human being with his protruding phallus does not originally belong to and consequently falls into conflict with the matrix of Wholeness as microcosmically represented by female body. As an avarice- and dichotomous animosity-fostering organ, phallus is implacably prepossessed with the objective of disentangling himself from the umbilical cord tenaciously binding him to the female body since such a disattachment is a definite prerequisite for him to assert oneself as a dichotomic counterpart glittering with an audacious demand to seize authority clemently resting at the disposal of female on behalf of maternal Wholeness and consequently chase her away from the central position which can be associated with and even deemed as identical with *Mother Earth*. Only if phallus manages to dissociate himself from womb, he is able to grasp the opportunity to grapple with, wield power over, seize, conquer, and eventually subjugate womb in the hollowness of which he has primarily crystallized into a full-fledged physical existence in flesh and blood. Once

phallus has completely disentangled himself from the umbilical cord, his appraisal of womb undergoes a substantial transformation since he no longer tends to regard womb as a peaceful shelter of affection practically even if his apparently innocuous sense of affection for his mother sustains throughout his life theoretically. His aggression is oriented towards womb image as a generic sexual target that needs to be conquered as he is gripped by a barely surmountable instinct to exert authority over womb and thus oppress her. This overwhelming instinct immersed in the ambition to usurp the center and decenter womb through oppression and expulsion practices can be formulated as *phallic greed*.

Phallic greed finds one of his most striking representations in the practice of colonialism featured by an overseas-expansionist prospect. Symbolically, immense domains of water separating and at the same time embodying lumps of land – i.e. continents – scattered across it called ocean correspond to a womb image as the 'earthly' representation of that enwrapping Wholeness which phallus feels conditioned to defy, conquer, and subjugate in order to consummate his vainglorious self-realization as an austere, awesome, and invincible executioner of authority. Geographical explorations which constituted an initial step taken on the way leading up to the rise of colonialism can symbolically be conceived of as primary ramblings of phallus across the matrix of sea-womb covering the Earth. In this respect, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, set against an intensely colonial backdrop, provides fecund ground for contemplation over the presumable alliance of phallic greed and colonial greed which converge on the basic, binding principle of seizure-and-subjugation of what is peculiar to maternal matrix. The indispensable common maxim on the basis of which both phallic greed and colonial greed intersect and cooperate harmoniously can be coined as the exclusion – or rather expulsion – of the feminine from decision-making, governing, manipulative mechanisms of socio-political domain through her being atrociously diminished to the demeaning position of an auxiliary, inferior, and malleable servant-object and/or commodity-object that can be abused, disposed, and bartered. *Heart of Darkness* can be reckoned as an appropriate attestment to this assertion since women become conspicuous through their scanty, mystified, and thereby marginalized representation as negligible figures lightly referred to in few instances. And in those few instances where female figures are – albeit scarcely – depicted, they are exposed to mystification and even demonization. One can make mention of three particular instances in the novel where subtly stereotyped female figures are derogatorily sketched out:

The first instance takes place at the headquarters of the Belgian company in Brussels where Marlow pays a visit to settle his employment transaction with officials of the company. At that setting two female employees are portrayed to be knitting black wool which corresponds to a pretty overt archetypal pattern

in which Fate/Fortune, as an unreliable and deceitful phenomenon, is associated with femininity to which these same negatory attributes – i.e. unreliability and deceit – are conventionally imputed. At this scene these two female employees are arguably insinuated as calamity howlers mutely portending the dreary confrontation to befall Marlow in Africa. The second noteworthy instance portraying a female figure is set during Marlow's sailing up the Congo River where he spots an African woman who turns out to be Kurtz's African lover. As is the case for female employees of the Belgian company, this time even by far more blatantly, Kurtz's lover is mystified as a stunning, awful, and even devilish Amazon warrior figure emitting menace and dazzling wickedness:

> And from right to left along the lighted shore moved a wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman. She walked with measured steps, draped in striped and fringed clothes, treading the earth proudly, with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments. She carried her head high; her hair was done in the shape of a helmet . . . She must have had the value of several elephant tusks upon her. She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate progress.
> (Conrad 78)

In this mystified physical description of Kurtz's lover the prejudicial aspect of both colonial discourse and phallic frame-of-mind are deftly spotlighted since the figure mystified here embodies the characteristics of being both an African and a woman: Namely, in this instance the dehumanization of the 'other' is represented in a two-tiered way in which two lanes smoothly drift into each other via the mystification (and demonization) of African as woman and woman as African. In "Joseph Conrad and Chinua Achebe: Two Antipodal Portraits of Africa" Okafor observes the mystification of African woman in *Heart of Darkness*, as well: ". . . in keeping with European prejudices about Africa, the African woman must be wild, as is the case in *Heart of Darkness*." (Okafor 21). The third remarkable depiction of woman is presented at the close of the novel where Marlow meets Kurtz's Intended. In this encounter, unlike two former instances, rather than being humiliated through mystification, woman is again illustrated as in an inferior status by being outlined as subordinate, sentimental, malleable, and deceivable. The representation of Kurtz's Intended, posing a stark contrast with portly and self-imposing disposition of Kurtz's African lover like an intimidating Amazon warrior, by and large fits into the subjugated Victorian *angel-in-the-house* stereotype who is indicated to have internalized the inferior role assigned to her. The common characteristic pinpointed by these three representations of woman in the novel – no matter how much they differ in terms of content – can be formulated as the dehumanization of woman through marginalization of femininity as locked

up in stereotypes which in the novel correspond to the ominous "*terrible mother*", awesome "*femme fatale*", and pusillanimous "*angel-in-the-house*" respectively.

River symbolism is another evocative topic worth contemplating on in *Heart of Darkness*. In this respect, attention shold be focused on the discrepancy between sea and river. Unlike sea which stands for a projection and embodiment of primordial maternal matrix, river can be asserted to represent a phallic deviation from maternal matrix in a way evocative of male infant's desire to detach himself from his mother so as to assert his individuality which undeniably bears an unconscious destructive propensity. As a snaky sneaking geographical object slithering into/out of earth which is – like sea – another projection and embodiment of maternal matrix, river can be construed as a phallic object indicative of masculine instinct to pierce, perforate, and penetrate. In the novel no matter how much River Thames and River Congo differ from each other in terms of socio-political inferences that can be ascribed to them as throbbing hearths of civilization and savagery respectively, they intersect at the point of betokening phallic greed as well as being reservoirs of evil lurking behind and propelling phallic greed. In "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" Achebe highlights the kinship binding these two rivers deliberately glossed over by colonial discourse. Although Thames and Congo differ from each other apparently in terms of connotations ascribed to them, they actually originate from a common gloomy basin which is entrenched in human nature: "Is Conrad saying then that these two rivers are very different, one good, the other bad?" (Achebe 4). Achebe's response to this inquiry is pretty compelling:

> It is not the differentness that worries Conrad but the lurking hint of kinship, of common ancestry. For the Thames too 'has been one of the dark places of the earth.' It conquered its darkness, of course, and is now in daylight and at peace. But if it were to visit its primordial relative, the Congo, it would run the terrible risk of hearing grotesque echoes of its own forgotten darkness, and falling victim to an avenging recrudescence of the mindless frenzy of the first beginnings. (Achebe 4)

As indicated in the quotation, both rivers are indeed ambuscading tokens of man's destructive avidity to assault, conquer, and subdue maternal matrix. In this sense, the River Thames as the departure location of voyage to Africa can be identified with the reservoir of evil looming behind phallic greed, whereas, the voyage made in the Congo River can be reckoned as a tangible crystallization of it (phallic greed). Accordingly, solely man-crewed steamer sailing up the Congo River can be likened to a wriggling pod of sperms couched in penis roaming through maternal earth flanking him. A further derivation that issues from phallic symbolism

illustrated through river imagery as propounded here can be summarized as river's standing for a gash or an incision made into womb by phallus to violate and suppress her (womb) at a macrocosmic level.

As implied in the quotation above, Achebe draws on European's anxiety about a portending perturbing confrontation with violence-generating male-v(i)olence embedded in his primordially spoilt core which is indeed identical with that of an African. Therefore, this male-v(i)olent impulse needs to be disavowed in order to embolden that ostensible moral gap between him as the sleek civilized party and the African as the reprehensible uncouth party and thus justify his assumption of an oppressive, overbearing, and superior role in his relationship with the African. In *Heart of Darkness* Africa is insinuated as the suppressed despicable *Id* of Europe where irrationality, ignorance, and immorality reign at full throttle: "... in *Heart of Darkness* Africa becomes an environment where irrational behaviour is the norm; hence even a European such as the Swede hangs himself for no apparent reason. ... *Heart of Darkness* portrays Africa as a land of savages who do not have any worthwhile culture or civilization." (Okafor 19-20). Accordingly, one may further comment that in the novel Africa is depicted as a scapegoat-topography liable to be pinned down as a 'dark' hunk of all repulsive notions and actions associated with barbarity "in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest". Thereby, the European will feel himself accredited with the exertion of oppressive authority on these servile(!) black Yahoos to smooth out their uncultivated manners. Replacing repulsive conduct with codes of decorum and inculcating these black Yahoos with a thorough awareness as to the appropriateness of pursuing patterns of docile morality(!) will serve to the accentuation of colonizer's role as the dictating superior party: "*Heart of Darkness* projects the image of Africa as 'the other world', the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality" (Achebe 3). Likewise, in "Postcolonial Criticism" chapter of *Beginning Theory* where Barry refers to Said's remarks about colonial discourse's conceptualization of the East which corresponds to Africa in case of Conrad's novel, Africa's figuration as Europe's sinister *Alter Ego* or *Id* in the colonialist's mind is boldly underscored: "The Orient, he (Said) says, features in the Western mind 'as a sort of surrogate and even underground self'. ... This means, in effect, that the East becomes the repository and projection of those aspects of themselves which Westerners do not choose to acknowledge (cruelty, sensuality, decadence, laziness, and so on)" (Barry 192). As can be inferred from Achebe's remark about colonialist's eagerness to conjure up a detestable decadent antipode to bolster his sense of conceited moral/mental superiority, Western Civilization which is dispositionally Apollonian lets its superiority take root in dichotomies. These stark oppositions such as civilization versus savagery, benevolence versus

wickedness, humility versus insolence, enable the configuration of an abominable source of menace to impute all contemptible notions and character traits to. In this respect, that Achebe draws an analogy between Africa and Dorian Gray's picture in terms of their symbolical position to Europe and Dorian Gray respectively provides a pretty fitting illustration:

> Africa is to Europe as the picture is to Dorian Gray – a carrier on to whom the master unloads his physical and moral deformities so that he may go forward, erect and immaculate. Consequently, Africa is something to be avoided just as the picture has to be hidden away to safeguard the man's jeopardous integrity.
> (Achebe 17-18)

As Achebe maintains through this fascinating analogy, sense of dichotomy can be acknowledged as a crucial maxim in the configuration of European identity which preys on the condemnation of constructed hostile "others" to justify and enhance the extent of its exploitative actions as marked out by Said too:

> Said argues that representations of the 'Orient' in European literary texts, travelogues and other writings contributed to the creation of a dichotomy between Europe and its 'others', a dichotomy that was central to the creation of European culture as well as the maintenance and extension of European hegemony over other lands.
> (Loomba 44)

For Said, establishment of hegemony and revelling in the sense of superiority generated by it (hegemony) are key expressions rounding up the gist of *Heart of Darkness*: ". . . the whole point of what Kurtz and Marlow talk about is in fact imperial mastery, white Europeans *over* black Africans and their ivory, civilization *over* the primitive dark continent" (Said 33). Likewise, in *The Location of Culture* Bhabha maintains the importance of this constructed stark bifurcation between the colonizer and the colonized in the justification of mediums of domination practised by colonial discourse to attain its utilitarian goals: "The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction" (Bhabha 70). Thanks to this constructed dichotomy, Europe appropriates the upper hand characterized by affirmative attributes like decorum, rationality, righteousness, industriousness, etc. Thus, the colonial mind feels himself entitled to cultivate the uncivilized 'other' by "exporting" his exalted cultural values which constitute the fundamental rudiments of civilization. This act of "exportation" forms the backbone of colonial discourse practised by that particular colonialist state which lays claim on the improvement of the morally

and mentally deficient 'other'. Following this track of reasoning, a presumable definition of colonial practice can be formulated as the relocation of colonizer's national/cultural values to the colonized as noted by Hobson: "Hobson makes the point that colonialism 'is a natural overflow of nationality', its test being 'the power of colonists to transplant the civilization they represent to the new natural and social environment in which they find themselves'." (Ashcroft 124).

Of those national/cultural values transplanted to the colonized by the colonizer, language along with religion (although it may be argued that religion's influence seems to have been scaled down thanks to the rise and encouragement of secular orientations particularly since the early decades of the 20th century in the West) can be acknowledged as the most vital instrument. Without the implementation of language in the colonized domain, colonial practice would remain crippled and not as efficient as intended. In order for the colonizer to have the colonized adopt his language by gradually having him disavow his native tongue and willingly substitute it with that of the colonizer, the denigration of the colonized party's language is almost a must. In this respect, the colonizer needs to spotlight the presumable inefficiency, primitivity, and queerness of the colonized's language. Through these labels describing the peculiarity of the colonized's language, the colonizer would gain ground to support his assertion regarding this vernacular tongue's ineligibility to be considered even a language on its own by stressing its localness. Thereby, colonial discourse would even stretch out his postulation as far as that this vernacular tongue would merely turn out to be a local dialect descending from an obscure bulk of tribal African languages. In *Heart of Darkness* language's indispensable role in the creation and consolidation of the civilized-versus-savage dichotomy is subtly handled via the portrayal of the African's language as an incomprehensible load of irritating cacophonic utterances as duly noted by Okafor, as well:

> Language is another aspect of human civilization that the Africans in *Heart of Darkness* are portrayed as lacking. What they speak is not recognizably human, and there is always an animal trait to their verbal communication. Hence whenever the African characters in the novel speak, their speech is described as yelling, or babbling, or howling.
> (Okafor 20)

In his comment given above Okafor highlights language's significant role in the conception of the civilized-versus-savage dichotomy which provides a suitable basis for the establishment and protraction of a strict hierarchical order between the colonizer and the colonized. In this respect, language can be reckoned as an Althusserian state apparatus in the diffusion of the dominant party's ideology

over the domain he desires to hold under his sway in terms of colonial discourse: "Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth', 'order', and 'reality' become established" (Ashcroft 7). What is striking about language is the similar role it plays in the construction and consolidation of a gender-based hierarchical order between women and men through its deployment by dominant phallic discourse as a highly efficient instrument of exclusion mechanism exercised upon women to distance them from the center usurped by phallus. In *Feminine Sexuality* Rose draws on Lacan's argument contradicting monotheistic religions's patriarchal claim dubbing man rather than woman as the original creation of God. Thereby, Rose implicitly contends that indeed phallus rather than womb should be assessed as a blatant deviation or an odd 'outsider' originally non-existent in the primordial maternal matrix represented by female body at a microcosmic level and by earth as well as sea at a macrocosmic level as mentioned earlier in this paper: "Within the phallic definition, the woman is constituted as 'not all', in so far as the phallic function rests on an exception (the 'not') which is assigned to her. Woman is excluded by the nature of words, meaning that the definition poses her as exclusion" (Rose 49). As can be derived from Rose's statement, phallic discourse, through language audaciously favouring the masculine over the feminine, tramples on women by 'excommunicating' them from the center of both public sphere and private sphere. To wrap up; just as language is deployed by colonialist discourse to establish the colonizer's alleged mental superiority over the colonized and thus provide a pretext for exploitative ends of the colonizer as outlined in *Heart of Darkness*, it (language) is also deployed by phallic discourse in a similar manner to construct gender with a view to affirming man's superiority over woman.

Predicated on the discussion of colonialism with reference to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* so far, a plausible conclusion that can be drawn as to the nature of colonialist party can be wrapped up as his operating on a phallocentric and utilitarian motive acquiring its strength from constructed dichotomies mentioned in the paragraphs above. Assuming a psychoanalytical perspective, of all these dichotomies the most essential one can be singled out as the womb/phallus dichotomy which finds its primary observable representation in male infant's relation with his mother. In "Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms" Klein diagnoses mother's breast as the initial target of destructive impulse emanating from phallus by terming it as "oral aggression". In her article Klein draws on two major accompanying, yet seemingly contradictory, mechanisms deployed by male infant to exploit his mother's body which can be denoted as consumption and expulsion. Consumption-Expulsion process operates on the dichotomy of "gratifying breast" and "frustrating breast" as envisioned by male infant. Whereas gratifying breast is

fancied by infant as a succulent lump that should be devoured to obtain satisfaction and exaltation, the frustrating breast is tagged as a repulsive stinking cesspool into which 'faeces' must be dumped to attain relief and purification:

> The phantasied onslaughts on the mother follow two main lines: one is predominantly oral impulse to suck dry, bite up, scoop out, and rob the mother's body of its good contents. . . . The other line of attack derives from the anal and urethral impulses and implies expelling dangerous substances (excrements) out of the self and into the mother. Together with these harmful excrements, expelled in hatred, split-off parts of the ego are also projected on to the mother or . . . into the mother.
> (Klein 183)

The relation between male infant and mother as outlined by Klein here can convincingly be applied to the one between the colonizer and the colonized. Just as infant is eager to drain off mouthwatering charm of his mother's gratifying breast through consumption to his own satisfaction; the colonizer is avid for appropriating and exploiting natural resources, raw materials, and human power of the colonized party to his own benefit. And again, just as infant is inclined to view frustrating breast as a disgusting dumping ground into which 'excrements' and all other sorts of 'rubbish' should be discharged; the colonizer designates the colonized as a shadowy realm of his suppressed, ostensibly stigmatized, and unconfessable desires which he pretends to dismiss. In other words, evocative of infant's relationship with the frustrating breast, as also propounded by Achebe and Said as quoted above, the colonizer denounces the colonized as the dreary domain of his allegedly disavowed *Id*. As indicated here, the common objective meant to be attained by male infant and colonizer can be formulated as the projection of death instinct and the introjection of the good object. Consumption-Expulsion mechanism, as explicated by Klein, enables one to come into terms with both phallocentric and utilitarian aspects of colonial practice since this process is rooted in a blend of colonialism's these two major chacteristics: Namely, primarily, colonial practice originates from phallic greed to conquer, abuse, and subdue. This marks out the phallocentric side of colonialism. And secondly, it (colonial practice) is concerned with the derivation of utmost benefit from the colonized realm – involving its both animate and inanimate assets – as an outcome of exploitative methods put into practice. This practical profit-oriented interest constitutes the utilitarian aspect of colonialism. Accordingly, needless to mention; as can readily be inferred from its 'protruding' phallocentric origin, colonialism is an overwhelmingly male-dominated realm where solely men are 'essentially' empowered to 'chop off the weeds', 'prune the branches', 'roughen up the ground', 'plough the field', 'sow the seeds', 'water the shoots', and 'reap the harvest'. As is the case for other male-dominated fields, in colonial practice the

colonizer who is definitely man usurps the right to exert austere authority over the colonized who can be associated with woman through mystification-marginalization mechanism. As delineated in *Heart of Darkness*, woman – like the colonized – is portrayed to undergo this mystification-marginalization process encouraged by phallocentrism as explored in the paragraph dealing with the representation of female figures (please beware not characters, but figures!) in the novel. In a sense, woman is treated as/like Africa, alias the *Dark Continent*. To relate, in "The Laugh of the Medusa" Cixous elaborates on the exclusion of women from writing process by phallogocentric discourse as they have been impeded from creating their own authentic literary style through overbearing indoctrination of masculine form of writing. Cixous's call for rebelling against the mystification-marginalization process to shake off the phallic monopoly on writing is applicable to the criticism of imposing colonial discourse which also preys on mystification-marginalization instrument to sustain the rational-versus-irrational dichotomy leaning his back against which he gathers strength to reign as the ultimate sovereign. Then, what is to be done to dismantle oppressive phallocentrism? Lend an ear to Cixous's exhortation and just gaze at Medusa in the eye. Without peeping, squinting, or glaring. Free from the rush of excessive haughty emotions. Decolonized. Deheterosexistualized. Detoxicated from patriarchal encroachment. In the eye:

> The Dark Continent is neither dark nor unexplorable. - It is still unexplored only because we've been made to believe that it was too dark to be explorable. And because they want to make us believe that what interests us is the white continent, with its monuments to Lack. And we believed. . . . You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing.
> (Cixous 884-885)

Beware. 'Detoxicated'. In the eye. No exclamation mark.

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Psihoanalitični razmislek o falocentrizmu in kolonializmu v Conradovem romanu *Srce teme*

Članek obravnava razkritja patriarhalnega ter kolonialnega diskurza in prakse, ki se na pronicljiv način združujejo in medsebojno delujejo v *Temnem srcu* Josepha Conrada. V tem pogledu je pomemben vidik pripovedi mizoginistična reprezentacija ženskih likov, ki so v heteroseksističnem moškem svetu zarisani kot nepomembni mistificirani stereotipi. Poleg tega konotativna upodobitev reke - za katero je značilna antagonistična aura, ki jo je mogoče pripisati nakazani primerjavi Konga in Temze - kot simbolno sugestivnega topografskega elementa spodbuja k pozornemu razmisleku. Nenazadnje je treba s psihoanalitične perspektive, ki jo odlikuje feministična senzibilnost, raziskati pomen jezika kot vplivnega instrumenta, ki podpira tako kolonialistične kot patriarhalne cilje.

Ključne besede: psihoanaliza, Freud, patriarhat, mizoginija, kolonializem, Conrad, Kongo

Il fantastico nel corpo e nella mente: la teoria delle appercezioni.
Definizione e applicazioni in Dino Buzzati, Giuseppe Genna e Michele Mari

Paolo Remorini

Riassunto

Con questo articolo presentiamo una nuova teoria del fantastico chiamata teoria dell'appercezione, con cui cerchiamo di mettere in contatto due dialoghi scientifici distinti. Considerando le ricerche degli ultimi decenni in ambito cognitivo e dei *Cognitive Literary Studies* (CLS) –simulazione incarnata, neuroni specchio, intersoggettività, intersequenzialità–, definiamo il fantastico come il legame che può emergere da una modifica delle nostre appercezioni linguistiche, narrative e paradigmatiche come anomalia, alterazione o trasgressione di almeno uno dei livelli cognitivi che operano in ogni esperienza narrativa. Allo stesso tempo offriamo uno schema analitico di testi narrativi fantastici, un'alternativa interpretativa nel dibattito duale tra il fantastico come genero letterario –derivante della teoria dell'esitazione di Todorov– e il fantastico come modo narrativo che sfrutta determinati meccanismi per *forzare* altri tipi di tesi –che possiamo far risalire agli studi di Bessière–. L'approccio cognitivo permette di sviluppare la teoria delle appercezioni, il cui punto centrale è individuare il grado e la profondità dei legami fantastici che emergono dalle connessioni appercettive in rapporto alla narrazione.

Parole chiave: fantastico, scienze cognitive, appercezioni, simulazione incarnata, Michele Mari

INTRODUZIONE

La letteratura fantastica ha sempre suscitato un intenso e fecondo dibattito riguardo alla sua identità all'interno dei sistemi letterari e riguardo al campo d'azione interno o esterno (o in entrambi i sensi) dei testi narrativi. Lo studio che ha dominato questo dibattito nell'ultimo mezzo secolo è stato l'*Introduction à la littérature fantastique* con cui Todorov nel 1970 proponeva la teoria dell'*hésitation du lecteur*, secondo la quale il fantastico dura il momento del dubbio conoscitivo che affligge il personaggio di una narrazione (e il lettore insieme a lui) di fronte a un fatto insolito, un evento non spiegabile tramite il sistema di conoscenze elaborato dalla sapienza umana. Con questa teoria Todorov definisce il fantastico come un genere letterario autonomo ma sempre in bilico tra due opzioni: se l'evento viene accettato passivamente dai personaggi entriamo nel meraviglioso; se invece viene fornita una spiegazione, nello strano.

Tutti i critici successivi hanno dovuto fare i conti con la teoria dell'esitazione di Todorov (Pacheco Soares, 2019), da una parte accettandone l'impostazione metodologica e cercando di allargare le maglie della ristretta cornice affidata al genere fantastico (Barrenechea, 1972; Carnevale, 2019; Zenkine, 2021; tra gli altri), dall'altra adottando invece prospettive diverse che potessero meglio dar conto delle svariate apparenze che può assumere il fantastico, definendolo perciò come modalità narrativa –non più genere letterario– che utilizza determinate scelte formali e tematiche per attraversare trasversalmente qualunque tipo di testo narrativo (Bessière, 1973; Jackson, 1981; Lugnani, 1983; Ceserani, 1996; Roas, 2011; Mesárová, 2014; Zangrandi, 2017; Puglia, 2020; tra gli altri). L'aspetto che in ogni caso accomuna tutti i critici contemporanei e che viene sottolineato in tutti gli studi sull'argomento è il carattere trasgressivo della letteratura fantastica, la sua capacità di trasgredire i confini narrativi, di sfidare la realtà, di alterare i processi ermeneutici (Gil Guerrero, 2006; Roas, 2011; Carnevale, 2019; tra gli altri).

Il presente studio si inserisce in questo dibattito offrendo una nuova definizione basata sulle ipotesi e i postulati della narratologia cognitiva e degli *Cognitive Literary Studies* (CLS)[1] –campi di studio che analizzano proprio le conseguenze delle ricerche delle scienze cognitive in ambito letterario, sfruttandone le implicazioni teoriche per proporre nuove prospettive d'indagine– di fantastico come legame che può emergere da una mancata corrispondenza delle nostre appercezioni come

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[1]   Per un excursus sui risvolti in ambito letterario del paradigma cognitivo si veda ad esempio il monografico «Literature and the Cognitive Revolution» edito da *Poetics Today* nel 2002 (vol. 23, no. 1), o Adler and Gross (2002), o le recentissime interviste fatte da Mutti (2022) ad alcuni tra i più imminenti narratologi cognitivi (Marco Caracciolo, Monika Fludernik, Patrick Colm Hogan e Karin Kukkonen) dove emerge la distinzione tra approcci di prima e seconda generazione con le 4E («embodied, embedded, enactive and extended nature of mind») degli CLS.

anomalia, alterazione o trasgressione di almeno uno dei livelli cognitivi ed ermeneutici operanti in ogni esperienza narrativa (livello linguistico-morfologico, livello narrativo-sintattico e livello paradigmatico-semantico).

Il fantastico si configura perciò intorno alle trasgressioni rispetto al paradigma di realtà, ai meccanismi narrativi interni e alla rappresentatività del linguaggio; tre livelli che interagiscono nella narrazione e che costituiscono le basi della nostra ricerca sul fantastico. Il legame è una forza che emerge dalle connessioni appercettive tra il lettore, il testo e tutte le possibili relazioni tra i due. A tal fine, offriamo al contempo uno strumento di ricerca per l'analisi dei singoli testi narrativi.

LA SIMULAZIONE INCARNATA COME SPAZIO DI INTERSOGGETTIVITÀ

Le ricerche nel campo delle scienze cognitive sviluppatesi nell'ambito della teoria della simulazione (*simulation theory*), innanzitutto grazie ai lavori di Robert Gordon (1986), Jane Heal (1986) e Alvin Goldman (1989), e poi grazie alla conferma dei loro postulati con la scoperta dei neuroni specchio (*mirror neurons*) nel 1992 da parte di un'équipe di neuroscienziati dell'Istituto di Fisiologia dell'Università di Parma coordinata da Giacomo Rizzolatti, hanno presto coinvolto il corpo e non solo il cervello o il funzionamento neuronale per una decisiva capacità di interpretare e comprendere il mondo che ci circonda e di interagire con gli altri.

Come spiega Gallese, l'accesso al mondo interiore degli altri passa attraverso una dimensione incarnata che relaziona le nostre esperienze sensitive e corporali con le esperienze che facciamo degli altri (2007: 659). Percepire un'azione –non solo come una sequenza di movimenti– equivale a *simularla* internamente, ossia ad attivare il meccanismo motorio pur in assenza dell'esecuzione fattuale di quella stessa azione (Gallese, 2019: 116). Ciò consente all'osservatore di utilizzare le proprie risorse neurali per penetrare il mondo dell'altro *dall'interno* mediante un meccanismo automatico e prelinguistico di simulazione motoria. Le evidenze scientifiche mostrano infatti l'attivazione degli stessi meccanismi specchio nella previsione delle azioni e nell'attribuzione delle intenzioni altrui. In questo modo, la simulazione incarnata si configura altresì come lo spazio fattivo in cui si materializza l'intersoggettività: «"l'altro oggettuale" diventa in una certa misura "un altro se stesso"» (Gallese et al., 2006: 558).

È qui che la simulazione incarnata si propone come superamento della teoria della mente, offrendo le basi biologiche e neuronali di una intersoggettività che da astratta diventa corporale:

> Through mirror mechanisms and embodied simulation, others appear to us as second selves, or second persons. We believe that this perspective provides a more vivid experience of intersubjectivity, relative to the detached, propositional deliberation on the experiences of others available in standard mind reading of others. (Gallese / Cuccio, 2015: 10)

Partendo dalle stesse premesse, Gallese e Lakoff (2005) hanno proposto inoltre una teoria della realizzazione neurale dei concetti che comporta anche una teoria della comprensione del linguaggio (teoria avallata anche di recente dallo studio realizzato da Kiefer et al., 2022). I concetti (o almeno i concetti di azioni, per es. *afferrare*) si incarnano nel sistema sensomotorio. Ciascuna caratteristica di un concetto d'azione (agente, oggetto, condizione iniziale, ecc.) si realizza dallo stato di attivazione di un gruppo di neuroni a due livelli distinti e sequenziali (il livello articolatorio-fonetico e il livello del contenuto semantico) (Gallese, 2007: 663). La comprensione linguistica si fonda perciò su meccanismi incarnati (*embodied*), cioè legati al corpo: «Secondo l'approccio "incarnato", le stesse strutture nervose che presiedono all'organizzazione dell'esecuzione motoria delle azioni svolgono un ruolo anche nella comprensione semantica delle espressioni linguistiche che le descrivono» (Gallese et al., 2006: 554). D'altro canto le simulazioni incarnate con cui i nostri meccanismi specchio rispondono all'interazione con il mondo esterno sono identiche a quelle che si attivano quando usiamo soltanto l'immaginazione (Gallese / Lakoff, 2005: 456). Ne consegue che quando leggiamo una storia proviamo le stesse sensazioni ed emozioni che proviamo in ambito sociale. Viene meno così la sostanziale differenza tra realtà e immaginazione. Il nostro corpo risponde a entrambe nello stesso modo:

> […] from a neuroscientific perspective, the border separating real and imaginary worlds appears much less sharp and clear than what humans thought for centuries. The similarity between our responses to real and fictional events transpires even at the level of single neurons. [...] embodied simulation theory can be used to both account for how we perceive the world and how we imagine it and build a world of fiction and experience it. (Gallese, 2007: 117)

Wojciehowski e Gallese hanno di recente applicato le evidenze della simulazione incarnata per approfondire il rapporto tra lettore e personaggi e stabilire una correlazione tra i vincoli sociali che ognuno di noi crea nei suoi rapporti interpersonali e i vincoli, pur di *finzione*, che creiamo con i personaggi delle storie che leggiamo. In questo studio evidenziano inoltre come siano le nostre pregresse esperienze di vita sociale a permetterci di riempire e dare un senso profondo ai pochi tratti che inevitabilmente caratterizzano i personaggi di finzione. È la simulazione incarnata che opera la necessaria modificazione dei frames e delle appercezioni con

cui ci immergiamo nella lettura e che ne veicolano le interpretazioni. Modifiche che riguardano appieno la nostra teoria del fantastico:

> When we navigate the parallel world of fictional narrative, we basically rely on the same brain-body resources shaped by our relation to mundane reality. These resources provide the functional scaffold and the building blocks that our engagement with fictional characters rearranges by means of different forms of framing. [...] cognitive narratology reveals that readers make sense of complex narratives by relying on very few textual or discourse cues. These cues, which fiction creatively reconfigures, are the expression of social practices that readers recognize because they are part of readers' lives». (2002: 62)

È comunque di fondamentale importanza sottolineare che ciascun lettore vivrà un'esperienza incarnata di lettura del tutto personale. Infatti, segnala a questo proposito Gallese, così come le capacità cognitive-sociali sono diverse per ognuno di noi e determinate in gran parte dalle nostre esperienze passate, allo stesso modo le risposte incarnate dei nostri meccanismi specchio variano da persona a persona (2019: 124). Lo spazio dell'intersoggettività è dunque cambiante, mutevole. È un territorio costruito intorno al testo e condiviso da tutti i lettori che si rinnova ad ogni lettura in ogni lettore, e si riempirà di contenuti diversi così come diverse sono le esperienze pregresse di ciascuno di essi.

In questo ambito si muove anche Patoine che tenta di relazionare i meccanismi specchio derivati dalla simulazione incarnata con l'atto di lettura che lui stesso definisce empatico. Partendo dall'ipotesi sviluppata da Garbarini e Adenzato (2004) secondo la quale la simulazione incarnata sostituisce la teoria della rappresentazione mimetica, cioè basata sull'imitazione, con una teoria appunto della simulazione e dell'azione, Patoine sottolinea come la lettura diventi un atto immersivo pienamente corporale (2019b: 202). Anziché parlare di intersoggettività, Patoine preferisce parlare di corpo fantasma, simulacro corporale dove si manifesta la simulazione incarnata prodotta dalla lettura empatica: «Podríamos por tanto considerar que la lectura empática produce sensaciones fantasmas, que le da vida a un cuerpo fantasma capaz de experimentar las imágenes evocadas por un texto» (2019a: 212). I due concetti –intersoggettività e corpo fantasma– condividono il carattere proteico. Anche nel caso del corpo fantasma, infatti, la lettura empatica varia di lettura in lettura e di lettore in lettore:

> Esa activación empática, o simulación neuronal, se encuentra influenciada por toda una serie de factores, entre los cuales cabe mencionar la simpatía y la identificación, el contexto de lectura y el tipo de texto que estamos leyendo, los hábitos y los objetivos de lectura. La influencia proviene asimismo del aprendizaje, de nuestros hábitos de acción y de nuestra memoria sensomotriz. Se trata, por tanto, de una influencia biográfica». (2019a: 212-213)

Tra le influenze dirette sulla lettura possiamo annoverare, ad esempio, il paratesto nella sua accezione più ampia (peritesto ed epitesto), che contribuisce a mediare in modo importante le aspettative e le percezioni estetiche ed ermeneutiche sul testo (Remorini, 2022).

SEQUENZIALITÀ DELL'ATTO DI LETTURA E DEI PROCESSI COGNITIVI COINVOLTI

Nell'ambito dei processi coinvolti nella lettura, più precisamente nella decodifica delle lettere e nella loro codifica in significato, dobbiamo evidenziare alcuni aspetti che hanno un profondo impatto sulla nostra teoria del fantastico.

In primo luogo, le ricerche sottolineano sempre di più come la lettura sia un'abilità complessa e trasversale a diverse aree del cervello (Binder / Fernandino, 2020: 881). Benché dal punto di vista meccanico il processo di lettura comporti un'alternanza visiva tra micromovimenti oculari di fissazione e saccadici (Kliegl et al., 2006: 12), da un punto di vista neurale deve essere considerato come un processo di estrema complessità (Dehghani et al., 2017). La lettura attiva non solo le aree di Broca e Wernicke, ma anche altre aree che fino a poco tempo fa non erano considerate funzionali al linguaggio e alla comprensione cognitiva. In questo modo, la ricerca ha superato l'idea della lettura come attività seriale per considerarla inseparabile dalle emozioni. In una visione olistica, la lettura –le cui sollecitazioni sul sistema limbico producono altresì la connessione dei due emisferi cerebrali– dipende dall'interazione tra cognizione, emozione, memoria e fisiologia (Kweldju, 2015: 129).

In secondo luogo, dobbiamo considerare i numerosi studi che dimostrano come alcune aree del cervello si attivino in ordine sequenziale durante il processo di lettura. Gallese, come abbiamo sottolineato sopra, aveva già evidenziato due diversi livelli di elaborazione del linguaggio. La ricerca neuroscientifica è poi riuscita a sequenziare le varie fasi della comprensione linguistica dei testi, ovvero: la decodifica dei fonemi, il riconoscimento dei fonemi in morfemi, la strutturazione dei morfemi in sintagmi e infine il significato semantico della frase. In particolare, la decodifica ortografica/fonetica avviene nei primi 400 millisecondi dall'inizio della lettura. Subito dopo c'è il riconoscimento morfemico, per poi passare alla strutturazione coerente delle frasi e l'attribuzione di significato. L'elaborazione viene completata circa 200 millisecondi dopo il riconoscimento fonetico (Gwilliams, 2019: 3).

In terzo luogo, le ricerche riguardanti il processo visivo bidirezionale tra occhi e cervello appaiono rivoluzionarie. Parrebbe naturale pensare che i recettori rilevino la luce che raggiunge la retina dei nostri occhi e la trasformino in segnali

che arrivano al nostro cervello, dove gruppi di neuroni elaborano le informazioni in modi sempre più complessi fino a interpretarle per identificare gli oggetti. Ma questo percorso non è l'unico possibile, e per certi versi neanche il più significativo. In realtà il più delle volte accade esattamente il contrario. Come dimostra il lavoro di Clark, la maggior parte dei segnali non viaggia dagli occhi al cervello, ma in direzione opposta, dal cervello agli occhi (2013: 185).

È il cervello che predice agli occhi ciò che dovrebbero vedere, attivando il processo neurale solo di fronte a qualche anomalia che determina un aggiustamento dell'immagine già presente nel cervello (2013: 181-182), che sembra aver adottato questo sistema per una questione di risparmio energetico, seguendo le leggi della termodinamica. Spende meno energia per regolare e modellare l'immagine già memorizzata, invece di creare costantemente dal nulla l'immagine completa (2013: 186).

È questo che succede quanto ritorniamo in una città, in una strada, in un luogo visitato tempo addietro, e ci sentiamo quasi straniti perché percepiamo che quello che appare davanti ai nostri occhi non corrisponde al dettaglio con l'immagine mentale ormai a noi familiare. È quello che succede quando entriamo in una stanza conosciuta e all'istante percepiamo un cambiamento (un mobile spostato, un oggetto in più sul tavolo, un quadro nuovo, ecc.).

Rovelli sottolinea le implicazioni rivoluzionarie di questi studi:

> Quello che succede è che il cervello si *aspetta* di vedere qualcosa, sulla base di quanto è successo prima e quanto sa. Elabora un'immagine di quanto *prevede* gli occhi debbano vedere. Questa informazione è inviata *dal* cervello verso gli occhi, attraverso stadi intermedi. Se viene rilevata una discrepanza fra quanto il cervello si aspetta e la luce che arriva agli occhi, *solo in questo caso* i circuiti neurali mandano segnali verso il cervello. Dagli occhi verso il cervello, cioè, non viaggia l'immagine dell'ambiente osservato, ma solo la notizia di eventuali discrepanze rispetto a quanto il cervello si attende. […] Quello che vediamo, in altre parole, non è una riproduzione dell'esterno. È quanto ci aspettiamo, corretto da quanto riusciamo a cogliere. Gli input rilevanti non sono quelli che *confermano* ciò che già sapevamo. Sono quelli che *contraddicono* le nostre aspettative. (2020: 119-20)

L'anomalia diventa così l'informazione davvero rilevante. È quindi di particolare interesse comprendere le relazioni che possono nascere, anche rispetto all'atto della lettura, tra le nostre appercezioni (determinate soprattutto dalle nostre esperienze passate) e le possibili anomalie, alterazioni e trasgressioni presenti in uno specifico testo narrativo.

L'APPERCEZIONE

Come anticipato alla fine dell'ultima sezione, in questa realtà neurale che abbiamo tratteggiato, all'interno di un contesto di aspettative linguistiche (fonologiche, morfologiche, sintattiche e semantiche), la nozione di *appercezione* risulta di fondamentale importanza. Sebbene il suo antecedente sia l'analisi del verbo *apercevoir* fatta da René Descartes nel trattato *Les Passions de lâme* del 1649, dove lo considera un elemento volitivo (chiamato *passione*) all'interno del processo cognitivo, il termine risale al XVIII secolo e al concetto di *Apperzeption* coniato per la prima volta nel trattato *Principes de la nature et de la grâce fondés en raison* (1714, originale in francese) dal matematico e filosofo tedesco Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz con il significato di un atto della mente con cui essa prende coscienza delle sue idee come proprie: «So it is well to make a distinction between perception, which is the inner state of the monad representing external things, and apperception, which is consciousness or the reflective knowledge of this inner state itself and which is not given to all souls or to any soul all the time» (1989: 637).

Il concetto venne ripreso da Immanuel Kant per identificare il principio trascendentale supremo che dirige la cognizione (Gentry, 2022: 37), mentre nel XIX e all'inizio del XX secolo è stato sviluppato prima in ambito speculativo dal filosofo Franz Brentano, nella sua concezione della percezione interna che accompagna ogni atto mentale, pur trattandosi di fenomeni distinti (Fréchette, 2011: 5), e in seguito dalla psicologia e dalla didattica che si sono interessate alle sue possibili applicazioni pratiche.

Da un lato, lo psicologo Johann Friedrich Herbart indica l'appercezione come un processo cruciale per la selezione di idee simili che dall'inconscio possono varcare la soglia del conscio, disturbando così la massa percettiva, cioè la congregazione di idee simili e correlate che dominano il conscio in un dato momento. Il termine appercezione diventa «a term for the assimilation of one representation or representational mass into another» (Kim, 2015). La funzione dell'appercezione è quella di assimilare idee diverse e spesso divergenti tra le serie operative di presentazioni, combinazioni e intere masse di percezioni che si intrecciano a volte del tutto e a volte in modo incompleto, in parte conformandosi e in parte opponendosi l'una all'altra, in un processo in cui le nuove appercezioni modellano e modificano le precedenti (anche come ricombinazione): «In this process the older apperceptive mass, consisting of concepts, judgments, and maxims, will tend to assimilate more recent and less settled impressions» (Ulich, 2022). In questo modo, Herbart enfatizza la connessione con il sé come risultato della somma delle esperienze precedenti. L'appercezione ha avuto un ruolo centrale nella sua teoria educativa, esposta nel libro *Allgemeine Pädagogik aus dem Zweck der Erziehung Abgeleitet* del 1806. Per Herbart, l'appercezione è più importante in classe della

percezione sensoriale, in quanto l'attenzione alla massa percettiva del bambino in relazione al materiale insegnato può indicare agli insegnanti come applicare il materiale in modo che le idee e i pensieri del bambino siano diretti verso una determinata informazione. Herbart sottolinea l'obbligo dell'insegnante di organizzare il corso in modo tale che il nuovo materiale possa essere adeguatamente integrato con il corpo di conoscenze già disponibili. Se le due cose sono separate, l'allievo non sarà in grado di assimilare la nuova esperienza (cioè la sua appercezione non sarà aggiornata) e sentirà frustrazione verso il suo processo di apprendimento.

Dall'altro lato, il padre della psicologia sperimentale e fondatore del primo laboratorio psicologico, Wilhelm Maximilian Wundt, nel suo *Grundriss der Psychologie* del 1897 distingue tra appercezione passiva e attiva. Secondo Wundt, la volontà appercettiva non è una concezione a posteriori, ma a priori, una qualità trascendentale della ragione, postulata dalla psicologia empirica come fonte ultima di tutti i processi mentali, e sottolinea quella che chiama *connessione appercettiva* e che stabilisce di volta in volta i legami che si formano nella coscienza: «It is apperception, in accordance with its own laws, that "decides" which of these possible connections are realized in consciousness» (Kim, 2016). Le leggi dell'appercezione elaborano l'agglutinazione delle rappresentazioni secondo legami di compressione (*Verdichtung*) o spostamento (*Verschiebung*) fino a raggiungere una sintesi rappresentazionale.

Il concetto di appercezione è stato inoltre utilizzato a partire dagli anni '30 da Henry A. Murray e Christiana D. Morgan dell'Università di Harvard per lo sviluppo del cosiddetto Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), un test di personalità proiettivo –della categoria dei metodi costruttivi tematici– utilizzato in psicologia e psichiatria per la ricerca sulla personalità. In particolare, valuta il contenuto dei pensieri e delle fantasie espresse dal soggetto, permettendo al clinico di conoscere simultaneamente le emozioni, gli atteggiamenti e i processi cognitivi del soggetto.

Le definizioni che incontriamo nei dizionari riflettono bene l'evoluzione semantica del concetto di appercezione. Pur non essendoci traccia del termine nelle cinque edizioni del vocabolario lessicografico della Crusca (1612, 1623, 1691, 1738 e 1923)[2] e neppure nel lemmario del Tesoro della Lingua Italiana delle Origini redatto dal CNR,[3] da una parte il Dizionario della lingua italiana di Tommaseo[4] e il

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2   Accademia della Crusca, s.v. «appercezione». http://www.lessicografia.it/ricerca_libera.jsp. (Accessed July 6, 2022).

3   Tesoro della Lingua Italiana delle Origini, s.v. «appercezione», http://tlio.ovi.cnr.it/TLIO/. (Accessed June 10, 2022).

4   Dizionario della lingua italiana di Tommaseo, s.v. «appercezione». https://www.tommaseobellini.it/#/items. (Accessed July 6, 2022).

Grande dizionario della lingua italiana UTET[5] ne riportano l'origine leibniziana, dall'altra il De Mauro[6] e soprattutto il dizionario Treccani approfondiscono invece la trasposizione di significato dal campo filosofico, «percezione di una percezione, cioè l'atto riflessivo attraverso cui l'uomo (del quale tale atto è proprio) diviene consapevole delle sue percezioni» alle implicazioni dell'uso in campo pedagogico e psicologico: «Con diversa accezione, diffusa soprattutto nella psicologia e pedagogia dell'800, processo di assimilazione e di inserimento di una nuova esperienza nel contesto delle esperienze passate».[7]

Quest'ultima definizione è la stessa proposta da Manfred Jahn, uno dei pochi narratologi a dedicare attenzione a questo tema. Jahn vaglia le implicazioni cognitive del termine, sottolineando il fatto che «our necessarily indirect perception of reality is the product of a good deal of personal interpretive processing. Apperception is the mental construct that makes us see (or from an interestingly different perspective: *allows* us to see) the world and what's in it *as* something» (2011: 90).

L'appercezione è il legame cognitivo incarnato con cui ci rapportiamo al mondo e anche ai testi narrativi nel territorio dell'intersoggettività. Come abbiamo osservato in relazione alla simulazione incarnata e all'intersoggettività, le nostre costruzioni mentali passate influenzano direttamente i processi cognitivi, ermeneutici ed estetici dell'esperienza narrativa. Le connessioni appercettive permettono di elaborare e inserire nuove percezioni ed esperienze nel flusso delle esperienze passate.

LA TEORIA DELLE APPERCEZIONI: IL FANTASTICO COME LEGAME

Applicando le conseguenze di queste ricerche alla lettura e all'interpretazione dei testi fantastici, possiamo elaborare la nostra teoria delle appercezioni. Abbiamo aspettative precise quando leggiamo testi narrativi. Abbiamo già evidenziato la natura trasgressiva dei testi narrativi fantastici (Gil Guerrero, 2006; Roas, 2011; Carnevale, 2019, tra gli altri) per la quale il fantastico si basa sulla trasgressione di queste aspettative pregresse che può concretizzarsi, seguendo l'ordine di lettura, a livello linguistico (fonemi e morfemi), a livello narrativo (sintattico) e a livello paradigmatico (semantico).

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5   Grande dizionario della lingua italiana UTET, s.v. «appercezione», https://www.gdli.it/pdf_viewer/Scripts/pdf.js/web/viewer.asp?file=/PDF/GDLI01/GDLI_01_ocr_570.pdf&parola=appercezione. (Accessed June 10, 2022).

6   Dizionario De Mauro, s.v. «appercezione». https://dizionario.internazionale.it/parola/appercezione.(Accessed July 6, 2022).

7   Vocabolario Treccani, s.v. «appercezione», https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/appercezione. (Accessed June 10, 2022).

La teoria delle appercezioni presuppone che quando ci troviamo di fronte a un testo narrativo il nostro corpo abbia già delle aspettative concrete su ciò che sta per leggere, appercezioni derivate da molti fattori diversi che concretizzano lo spazio dell'intersoggettività (esperienze di lettura precedenti, biografia personale, stato d'animo ed emotivo, paratesto, ecc.) e che inquadrano e incanalano la lettura successiva anche in termini di intersequenzialità –«assumptions and conjectures about what will happen next» (Pier, 2016: 23)–. Presuppone altresì che se non si riscontrano anomalie in nessuno dei livelli operativi che si susseguono durante l'atto della lettura, la nostra cognizione e le nostre appercezioni rimangono invariate, modificandosi solo in presenza di legami fantastici che mettono in relazione le nostre esperienze precedenti con le alterazioni che troviamo nel testo.

Definiamo quindi il fantastico come il legame che può emergere da una mancata corrispondenza di appercezioni come anomalia, alterazione o trasgressione di almeno uno dei livelli cognitivi ed ermeneutici operanti in ogni esperienza narrativa (livello linguistico-morfologico, livello narrativo-sintattico e livello paradigmatico-semantico).

La materializzazione della trasgressione comporta un adeguamento degli schemi cognitivi che devono adattarsi alla nuova appercezione creata e dipende dalla capacità del lettore di riconoscere la trasgressione (se non viene riconosciuta come tale, non vi è alcuna appercezione frustrata).

Se il fantastico emerge come legame, allora si relativizza la questione di stabilire se una narrazione è o non è fantastica. Più che chiarire i limiti di un genere fantastico sorto senz'altro nel XIX secolo con tutti i crismi della storicità (Todorov, 1970; Barrenechea, 1972; Carnevale, 2019; Zenkine, 2021; tra gli altri) o le scelte formali e tematiche che ne hanno perpetrato l'esistenza in pieno XX e XXI secolo costruendo un modo narrativo che inverbera testi letterari più compositi (Bessière, 1973; Jackson, 1981; Lugnani, 1983; Ceserani, 1996; Roas, 2011; Reza, 2015; Puglia, 2020, tra gli altri), diviene importante accertare il grado di profondità del legame fantastico rispetto al testo in cui può sorgere.

A tal fine, proponiamo uno schema analitico di ricerca del legame fantastico basato sulla sequenzialità dei testi narrativi secondo tre possibili livelli di anomalia:
- L: linguistica (fonetica/morfologica)
- N: narrativa (sintattica)
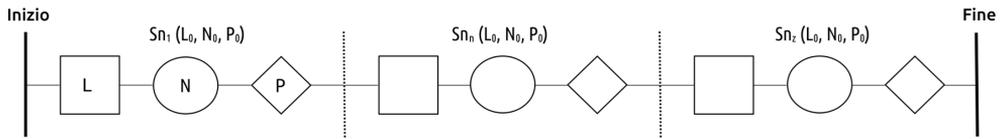- P: paradigmatica (semantica)

Figura 1. Schema analitico.
(Sn= sequenza narrativa. Sn_n e Sn_z indicano rispettivamente una o più sequenze qualsiasi e l'ultima sequenza del testo. L_0, N_0 e P_0 indicano l'assenza di legami fantastici).

Il legame fantastico può essere *nucleare*, rimanendo all'interno di una certa sequenza, e allora lo definiamo come *anomalia* (1 livello / 1 sequenza).
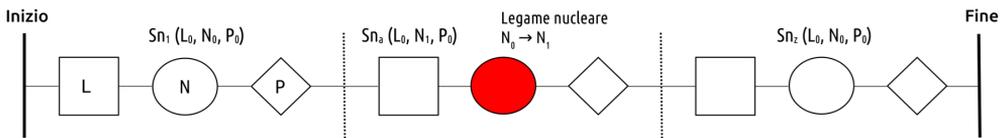
Figura 2. Legame nucleare (anomalia).
(Sn_a indica la determinata sequenza dove emerge l'anomalia).

Nell'esempio il legame fantastico nucleare stabilisce un'anomalia narrativa che rimane all'interno della seconda sequenza, senza influenzare altri livelli o altre sequenze. N_0 diventa N_1 solo in quella sequenza, tornando a N_0 nella successiva.

Può essere *trasformativo*, cambiando il livello stesso e passando da una sequenza all'altra, e allora lo definiamo come *alterazione* (1 livelli / n sequenze).
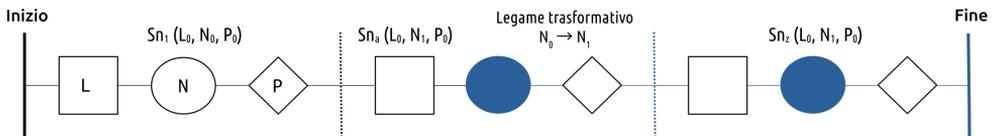
Figura 3. Legame trasformativo (alterazione).

Qui il legame fantastico trasformativo stabilisce un'alterazione narrativa che cambia lo stesso livello in sequenze successive. N_0 diventa N_1 fino alla fine della narrazione.

Può essere *espansivo*, interessando anche altri livelli e altre sequenze, e allora lo definiamo come *trasgressione* (n livelli / n sequenze).
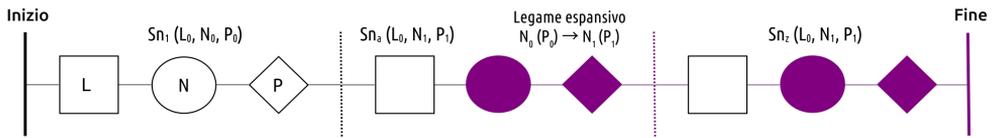
Figura 4. Legame espansivo (trasgressione).

In questo esempio, il legame fantastico espansivo stabilisce una trasgressione narrativa che riguarda anche il livello paradigmatico/semantico e si estende ad altre sequenze. N_0 e P_0 diventano N_1 e P_1 fino alla fine della narrazione.

Va sottolineato che i tre legami possono comparire nello stesso testo, alternandosi o scambiandosi nel corso della narrazione. È quindi necessario analizzare ogni sequenza in modo indipendente e stabilire il tipo di relazione che si sta instaurando.

D'abbiamo inoltre evidenziare come i tre livelli sequenziali corrispondano ai tre campi operativi nei processi cognitivi segnalati dagli studi della narratologia cognitiva: *world schemas*; *text schemas*; *language schemas* (Stockwell, 2002: 80). Il campo *world schemas* comprende gli schemi relativi al contenuto. Rappresenta il livello semantico e paradigmatico dei testi. Il campo *text schemas* rappresenta le nostre aspettative su come lo schema del mondo ci appare in termini di sequenza e organizzazione strutturale. Rappresenta il livello sintattico e organizzativo delle strutture narrative. Il campo *language schemas* contiene la nostra idea delle forme appropriate di modello linguistico e di stile. Rappresenta il livello morfologico e linguistico. Seguendo con l'analisi di questi campi operativi, Shen sottolinea in modo chiaro la distinzione tra storia (l'area del contenuto) e discorso (le due aree di rappresentazione), che deve essere tenuta in considerazione dato che «since the level of presentation contains both organizational (narratological) and language (stylistic) choices, focusing only on one aspect will result in a partial picture of "how the story is presented"» (2005: 142).

Possiamo per questo segnalare anche nel nostro schema analitico la ripartizione tra area del discorso e area della storia:
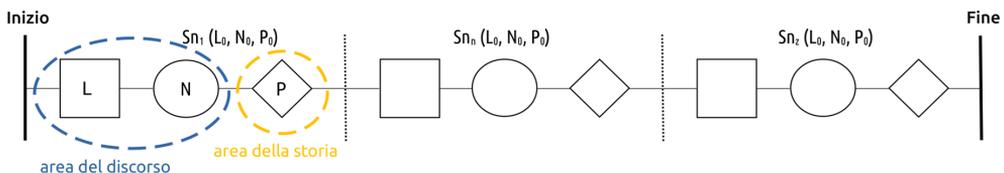

Figura 5. Schema analitico con aree del discorso e della storia.

Nessun aspetto formale (discorsivo) o tematico (di contenuti) elude possibili trasgressioni fantastiche, come dimostrato dal prezioso lavoro di catalogazione e tipificazione elaborato da Lang (2006) che suddivide le trasgressioni fantastiche in quattro categorie (sillepsi, epanalessi, metalessi, iperlepsi) distinguendo all'interno di ogni categoria le trasgressioni del piano del discorso e quelle del piano della storia. A loro volta ogni trasgressione può rimanere all'interno dello stesso livello diegetico o extradiegetico (trasgressione orizzontale) o passare a livello diegetico o extradiegetico distinto (trasgressione verticale).

Passiamo quindi a mettere in pratica questo schema analizzando alcuni testi per scoprire la casistica di ogni legame.

LEGAME NUCLEARE: IL FANTASTICO COME ANOMALIA

Se l'elemento fantastico compare in una determinata sequenza senza influenzare il testo narrativo nel suo complesso, diciamo che crea un legame nucleare, rimanendo un'anomalia. Il riaggiustamento dell'appercezione è momentaneo, si limita a modellarsi nel corso di una sequenza per accogliere l'anomalia, ma ritorna alla configurazione precedente dalla sequenza successiva e senza cambiare le appercezioni per il resto della narrazione.

Sul piano linguistico possiamo considerare anomalie nucleari le parole che Gianni Rodari (indimenticato autore tra l'altro dell'ammirevole *Grammatica della fantasia* del 1973) inventa per i suoi testi, come ad esempio «spennello» in "Parole nuove" della raccolta del 1995 *Versi e storie di parole*, o la sequenza «spik autri flok skak mak tabu mihalatti» pronunciata dal principe norvegese Nicholaus Klimius nel racconto "La tenia mistica" di Tommaso Landolfi, cui seguono le esclamazioni «Kakidoran» y «Pikil-fu» (*La spada*, 1976).

Allo stesso modo, produce un legame nucleare l'anomala critica astrattista che il protagonista Paolo Malusardi dedica alla mostra del pittore Leo Squittinna nel racconto "Il critico d'arte" di Dino Buzzati (*Sessanta racconti*, 1958):

> di del dal col affioriccio ganolsi coscienziamo la simileguarsi. Recusia estemesica! Altrinon si memocherebbe il persuo stisse in corisadicone elibuttorro. Ziano che dimannuce lo qualitare rumelettico di sabirespo padronò. E sonfio tezio e stampo egualiterebbero nello Squittinna il trilismo scernosti dancomacona percussi. Tambron tambron, quilera dovressimo, ghiendola namicadi coi tuffro fulcrosi, quantano, sul gicla d'nogiche i metazioni, gosibarre, che piò levapo si su predomioranzabelusmetico, rifè comerizzando per rerare la biffetta posca o pisca. Verè chi…. (1958: 264)

È evidente come in questo caso l'anomalia linguistica rappresenti a livello testuale la trasposizione dell'assenza di significato dei quadri osservati nell'esposizione, nell'esplicito intento da parte del protagonista-critico di «trasferire sulla pagina la tecnica finora adottata sulle tele» (1958: 263).

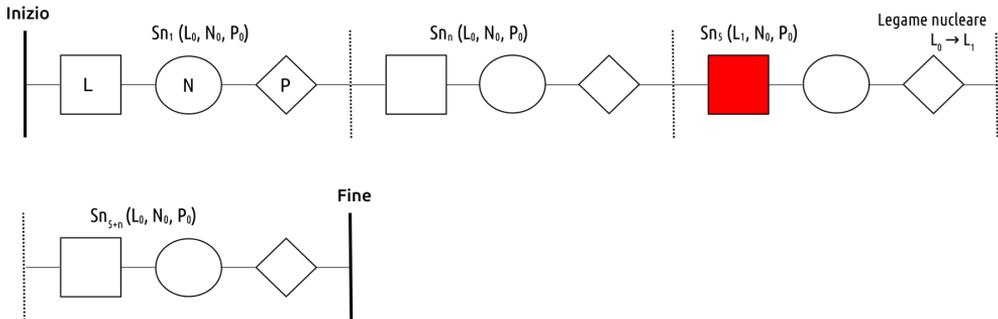Possiamo rappresentare il legame fantastico che si crea nel racconto attraverso il seguente schema analitico:

Figura 6. Schema analitico de "Il critico d'arte".

Da considerarsi anomalie del livello linguistico anche i legami nucleari che emergono da testi riconducibili al cosidetto *New Italian Epic* (NIE) come *La visione del cieco* di Girolamo De Michele (2008). Nel libro di De Michele «diverse scene-chiave sono descritte dal punto di vista di un gatto, Merlino, unico testimone di un delitto» (Wu Ming, 2009: 82). Per esempio il capitolo settanta:

> suonoporta: clac-clac-clac: aperto
> luce
> odoreumano: formeumane: odorenonsaputo
> avvicinante saltante
> scarpaveloce avvicinante: brutto: allontanante
> odore: cattivo
> me: soffiante
> rumorepassi umanoostile: avvicinante odore umanoostile: forte
> brutto: allontanante-soffiante
> aperto: me fuori
> rumore
> scale-strada: pioggia (2008: 276)

Nell'impianto complessivo del romanzo questi tipi di anomalie contribuiscono a rappresentare la scena e l'atmosfera nella quale è avvenuto l'omicidio: «Lungi dall'essere un espediente gratuito, la scelta trasuda com-passione verso i viventi non-umani» (Wu Ming, 2009: 82).

Sul piano narrativo, le anomalie hanno a che fare, ad esempio, con le fulminanti intrusioni del narratore nello sviluppo dell'azione, o con gli appelli diretti al lettore, risorse ripetute che alterano per un attimo questo livello che riscontriamo spesso in vari scrittori e testi narrativi (come in *Roderick Duddle* di Michele Mari, o alla fine del romanzo *Grande Madre Rossa* di Giuseppe Genna del 2004, quando il narratore afferma: «Io sono colui che sono. Chi è "io"? Chiediti chi sia "io". Tu dove sei, lettore? Chi sei tu, lettore?"» (2004: 275). Seguendo la terminologia impiegata da Lang, si tratterebbe di tutti i casi di trasgressione verticale del discorso. L'ultimo romanzo menzionato di Genna presenta anche un'anomalia inerente la focalizzazione del discorso narrativo del primo capitolo. Riportiamo le prime frasi:

> Lo sguardo è a diecimiladuecento metri sopra Milano, dentro il cielo. È azzurro gelido e rarefatto qui.
> Lo sguardo è verso l'alto, vede la semisfera di ozono e cobalto, in uscita dal pianeta. La barriera luminosa dell'atmosfera impedisce alle stelle di trapassare. C'è l'assoluto astro del sole sulla destra, bianchissimo. Lo sguardo ruota libero, circolare, nel puro vuoto azzurro.
> Pace.
> Lo sguardo punta ora verso il basso. Verso il pianeta. Esiste la barriera delle nuvole: livide. Lo sguardo accelera. (2004: 11)

Sembra l'incarnazione dell'idea che la realtà esista solo quando osservata; che l'osservatore modifica la realtà mentre si relaziona con essa: «Cala giù in picchiata verso Milano, raggiunge il tetto di un edificio, lo penetra, cade a piombo attraverso tutti i piani, fora l'ultimo pavimento, raggiunge le fondamenta, *tocca* un ordigno esplosivo potentissimo e si dissolve al momento dello scoppio, mentre è ridotto a polvere il Palazzo di Giustizia» (Wu Ming, 2009: 31). Sembra la personificazione del cambio di paradigma di realtà avvenuto dall'avvento della fisica quantistica riassunto così da Rovelli: «La realtà è ridotta a interazione. La realtà è ridotta a relazione» (2014: 118). Wu Ming lo chiama «sguardo obliquo», uno dei tratti distintivi che contraddistinguono le narrazioni del *New Italian Epic*: «Lo sguardo… di chi? Di nessuno, di niente. È uno sguardo disincarnato, una non-entità. È lo sguardo di uno sguardo. Nel proseguimento del libro, di quello sguardo non vi è più traccia e menzione, i personaggi ignorano che sia esistito. Unico testimone della sua apparizione e discesa, il lettore. Che potrebbe anche aver avuto un'allucinazione» (Wu Ming, 2009: 31).

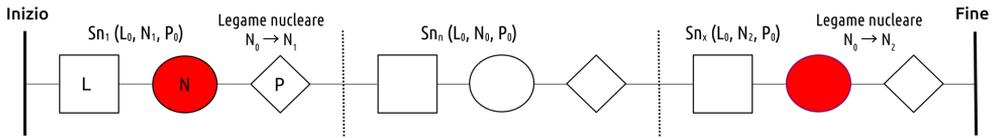Raffiguriamo i due legami nucleari fantastici del libro di Genna:

Figura 7. Schema analitico di "Grande Madre Rossa".

Sul piano paradigmatico dobbiamo segnalare una questione che andrebbe approfondita, perché merita senza dubbio una trattazione a parte e più esaustiva. Se consideriamo le anomalie come legami nucleari che modificano solo una determinata sequenza, potremmo ipotizzare che siano proprio queste anomalie, applicate al livello paradigmatico, a contribuire alla costruzione dei testi del cosiddetto realismo magico. La differenza tra le narrazioni fantastiche e quelle appartenenti al realismo magico starebbe proprio nel fatto che, in queste ultime, il fantastico costruisce solo legami nucleari che non influiscono sulla narrazione nel suo complesso. Secondo la nostra teoria delle appercezioni, ciò che caratterizza il realismo magico non è l'accettazione da parte dei personaggi e del lettore di un evento insolito, ma piuttosto il fatto che in questo tipo di narrazione la presenza dell'evento insolito non produce una modifica delle nostre appercezioni. Così, i legami che si creano possono solo essere nucleari, senza mai arrivare a essere trasformativi o espansivi.

LEGAME TRASFORMATIVO: IL FANTASTICO COME ALTERAZIONE

Se l'elemento fantastico, come abbiamo visto, produce un cambiamento a qualsiasi livello che si ripercuote sullo stesso livello in sequenze successive, diciamo che crea un legame trasformativo, cioè trasforma quel livello fino alla fine della narrazione, presentandosi come un'alterazione.

Sul piano linguistico segnaliamo i diversi effetti prodotti dal legame nucleare rispetto a quello trasformativo. Se nel primo infatti l'anomalia linguistica rimane uno strumento di momentaneo straniamento che non cambia il livello linguistico della narrazione, nel secondo invece l'alterazione del livello in tutte le sequenze produce effetti durativi nella costruzione stessa del racconto.

Consideriamo ad esempio "Piero di Cosimo" di Michele Mari (*Fantasmagonia* 2012). Il testo presenta come epigrafe tre brevi passaggi tratti da *Vita di Piero di Cosimo* di Giorgio Vasari (presente in *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architetti* edito per la prima volta nel 1550) che con tutta evidenza servono da cornice locativa (ci introducono cioè alla materia della storia). Il racconto di

Mari si susseguè poi lungo tre diverse sequenze che sviluppano i tre paragrafi dell'epigrafe, ricalcando proprio lo stile linguistico cinquecentesco del Vasari. Ricaviamo quindi il seguente schema analitico:
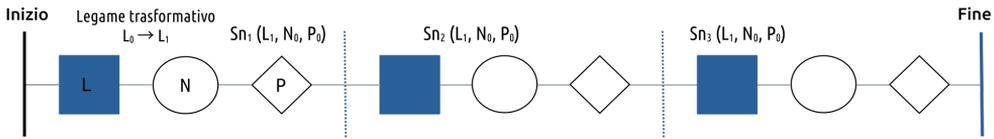

Figura 8. Schema analitico de "Piero di Cosimo".

Lo stile usato da Mari per costruire il racconto produce un vincolo fantastico trasformativo in cui l'alterazione linguistica funziona qui come motore della narrazione.

Per quanto riguarda il livello narrativo e quello paradigmatico, vale la pena notare come in questo gruppo rientrino tutti i testi con un finale a sorpresa che cambia retroattivamente l'interpretazione dell'intera narrazione. Prendiamo ad esempio il racconto "La famiglia della mamma" di Michele Mari (*Fantasmagonia*, 2012), costruito su tre storie familiari (le prime tre sequenze della narrazione) che una mamma racconta al proprio figlio affascinato dalle cruente tragedie che le pervadono. Nella prima gli racconta dello zio Alfred, morto di dolore dopo aver cacciato di casa l'unica figlia buona di cuore ed essere rimasto con le altre due malvagie, che prima lo schiavizzano facendolo morire dal dolore e infine si avvelenano l'un l'altra quando si suicida quella rimasta in vita. Nella seconda del cugino Harold che scopre che l'assassino del padre è lo zio, risposatosi poi con sua madre. Nella terza del bisnonno Rufus che subendo l'inganno del segretario finisce per strangolare la moglie, ritenuta adultera. Nella quarta sequenza entra in scena il padre del bambino, che rimprovera la moglie per la crudeltà e le efferatezze presenti nelle storie familiari che continua a raccontare al figlio. Nella quinta, l'ultima, si esplicita il nome della mamma, il tempo e lo spazio di svolgimento del racconto da cui si inferisce con facilità la vera identità del bambino: «Così disse Mary Arden, nell'anno di grazia 1572, nella cittadina di Stratford-upon-Avon, contea di Warwick, Inghilterra» (Mari, 2012: 11).

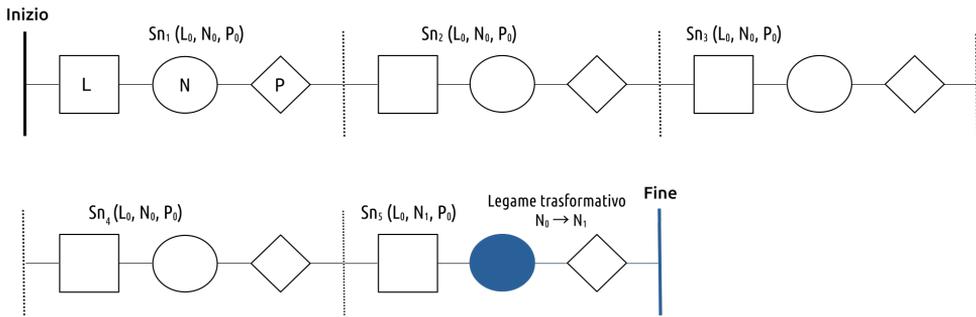Dal sequenziamento possiamo ricavare il seguente schema analitico:

Figura 9. Schema analitico de "La famiglia della mamma".

È evidente come la rivelazione dell'identità del bambino, William Shakespeare, cambi a ritroso l'importanza delle storie familiari della mamma, che possiamo adesso riconoscere come le trame di tre tragedie tra le più importanti del bardo di Avon. La storia dello zio Alfred è difatti la trama del *Re Lear*; quella del cugino Harold è *Hamlet*; quella del bisnonno Rufus è *Otello*. L'ultima sequenza rappresenta una metalessi verticale del personaggio che passa dal mondo diegetico a quello extradiegetico, creando così un legame trasformativo che altera il livello narrativo del racconto.

LEGAME ESPANSIVO: IL FANTASTICO COME TRASGRESSIONE

Indichiamo come trasgressione il legame espansivo che emerge in un determinato livello e finisce per espandersi a un altro livello (o più di uno) e a un'altra sequenza (o più di una).

Prendiamo in considerazione due racconti. Il primo è "I giorni perduti" di Dino Buzzati, pubblicato nella raccolta *Le notti difficili* del 1971, nel quale il protagonista Ernst Kazirra, tornando alla sua «sontuosa villa», trova un uomo intento a caricare su un camion delle casse prese dalla casa. Non riuscendo a fermarlo in tempo, lo segue fin sul ciglio di un burrone, evidente discarica di tale mercanzia. Scopre così che le casse sono piene dei suoi giorni perduti. Ne apre tre e vede prima la fidanzata «che se n'andava per sempre. E lui neppure la chiamava», poi il fratello nella solitaria stanza d'ospedale («[…] lui era in giro per affari»), infine il «fedele mastino che lo attendeva da due anni, ridotto pelle e ossa. E lui non si sognava di tornare». Il protagonista vorrebbe quindi riavere indietro almeno quei tre giorni, anche pagando («Io sono ricco. Le darò tutto quello che vuole»), ma lo scaricatore con un gesto si mostra incorruttibile, svanendo infine nell'aria insieme alle casse.

La corrispondenza *casse = giorni perduti* viene prima insinuata nel testo durante il dialogo tra i due personaggi («E cosa sono tutte queste casse?». Quello lo guardò e sorrise: «Ne ho ancora sul camion, da buttare. Non sai? Sono i giorni»), e poi sancita anche sul piano linguistico da un inaspettato cambio morfemico. Una volta a conoscenza del contentuto delle casse, il protagonista infatti vuole vedere con i propri occhi, così scende la scarpata «[…] e ne aprì uno». Il partitivo *ne* è un pronome indefinito nel genere e nel numero. L'uso della desinenza maschile *-o* si riferisce al contenuto, al giorno, ma il verbo *aprire* dovrebbe fare riferimento a ciò che contiene, alla cassa, per cui ci saremmo aspettati di leggere *ne aprì una*. La sostituzione è avvenuta. Lo straniamento prodotto dal cambio grammaticale pervade il piano narrativo e permette al protagonista di aprire le casse e vederci dentro frammenti di vita ormai passata, conseguenze di misere scelte che lo costringono al rimpianto.
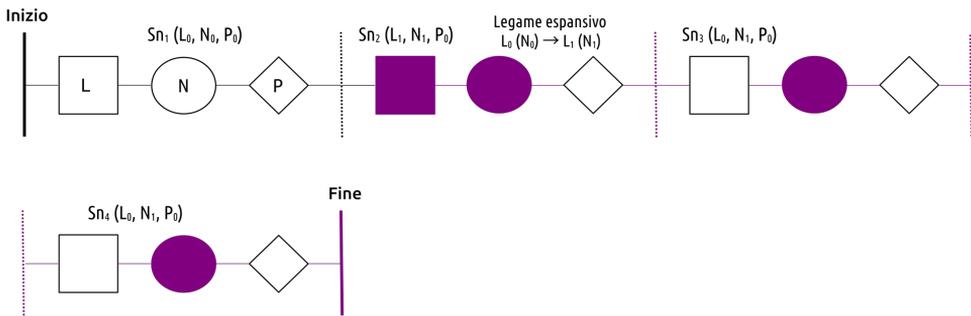
Vediamo nel dettaglio lo schema analitico:

Figura 10. Schema analitico de "I giorni perduti".

Il legame espansivo emerge dal testo grazie al cambio di un morfema grammaticale che riconfigura le nostre appercezioni intorno a un attrattore diverso, trasgredendo il livello linguistico fino ad alterare il livello narrativo per tutto il prosieguo del racconto.

Il secondo racconto è "Josef K." di Michele Mari (*Fantasmagonia*, 2012). È la storia dell'infanzia del protagonista e della successiva ricerca del padre. La storia è costruita su alcune coppie di personaggi e autori (Josef K./Kafka, Scardanelli/Hölderlin, Pinocchio/Collodi), ma ciò che la rende fantastica sono le trasgressioni finali di un determinato personaggio che non avrebbe dovuto o potuto avere precise informazioni sul protagonista.

Il protagonista, Josef K., non sa chi siano i suoi genitori. L'unica notizia è la professione del padre: falegname. Per questo motivo, e anche perché un po' pigro nei movimenti, i suoi compagni di scuola lo chiamano *Scardanelli* (l'insegnante

aveva raccontato alla classe che il poeta tedesco Hölderlin firmava le sue poesie con questo pseudonimo durante gli anni in cui viveva in una casa di falegnami). Dopo gli insuccessi nello sport e con la sua prima e unica ragazza, Lena, decide di iniziare la sua «indagine anamnestica» alla ricerca del padre. Chiede informazioni a un rabbino, a un prete luterano e a un prete ortodosso, ma questi non sanno dirgli nulla. Un sacerdote cattolico lo indirizza invece in Italia (da Praga, dove intuiamo vivesse). Sulla strada, un ciabattino gli dice di andare a Pescia, vicino a Pistoia, in Toscana. Giunto in paese, una «vecchia mendicante» lo riconosce subito come il figlio del vecchio falegname e gli rivela finalmente la sua vera doppia identità: Josef K. è Pino (da Pinocchio), figlio di Geppetto, da cui ha ereditato le movenze «legnose», ma è anche il figlio di Carlo Lorenzini alias Collodi, lo scrittore e autore de *Le avventure di Pinocchio. Storia di un burattino*, da cui ha ereditato l'angoscia (come Kafka accusava il padre di avergliela trasmessa, da cui il paragone con Josef K., protagonista del romanzo di Kafka *Der Process*). Si materializza in questo punto una paralessi verticale ascendente: la vecchia mendicante possiede informazioni che non appartengono al livello diegetico ma a quello extradiegetico.

Infine, dopo aver lasciato Josef K. da solo nella casa del padre falegname, la vecchia mendicante lo saluta chiamandolo Scardanelli, come i suoi compagni di scuola. Qui, alla fine della storia, si verifica una paralessi orizzontale interna. Il personaggio della vecchia mendicante dice più di quanto ci si potrebbe aspettare, dal momento che, secondo la struttura interna della storia, non poteva possedere questa informazione diegetica, disponibile solo nel luogo da cui il protagonista parte per la sua ricerca.

Le due paralessi, in quanto voci informative inaspettate, producono alterazioni narrative con effetti metalettici. Il protagonista condivide lo stesso livello di azione degli altri personaggi, compresi l'insegnante e i compagni di classe. Il livello di azione condiviso dal personaggio della vecchia mendicante con il protagonista Josef K., invece, incorpora il livello di azione degli altri personaggi. L'informazione *Scardanelli* trasgredisce lo status di focalizzazione attivo in quel momento della narrazione, che comporta lo spostamento dei riferimenti narrativi spazio-temporali interni: una metalessi diegetica orizzontale del personaggio.

D'altro canto, il passaggio dallo status di focalizzazione alla struttura metanarrativa del racconto, la paralessi verticale, implica lo slittamento dei riferimenti ontologici spazio-temporali: una metalessi verticale del personaggio.

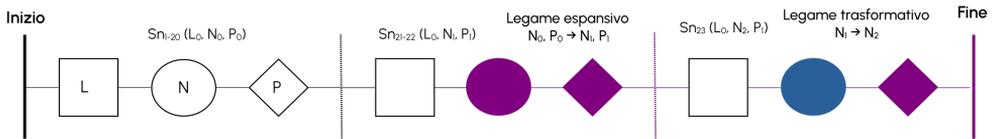Possiamo quindi tracciare il seguente schema analitico:

Figura 11. Schema analitico di "Josef K.".

Nella sequenza 21 la paralessi verticale ascendente (la «vecchia mendicante» che rivela a Josef K./Pino la sua doppia identità) comporta una metalessi verticale che crea un legame fantastico espansivo che trasgredisce il livello narrativo e influisce su quello paradigmatico (N_0 e P_0 passano a N_1 e P_1), riconfigurando la nostra appercezione sull'area della storia intorno a un nuovo attrattore.

Nella sequenza 23, invece, la paralessi orizzontale interna (la «vecchia mendicante» che saluta il protagonista come *Scardanelli*) comporta una metalessi orizzontale che crea un legame fantastico trasformativo che altera di nuovo il livello narrativo (N_1 passa a N_2) e modifica ancora la nostra appercezione del livello narrativo nell'area del discorso.

CONCLUSIONI

In questo articolo abbiamo cercato di mostrare come i progressi neuroscientifici sulla simulazione incarnata e sui neuroni specchio legati alle capacità cognitive sociali di interpretare e interrelazionarsi con gli altri, e le ipotesi della narratologia cognitiva e degli *Cognitive Literary Studies* (CLS) implichino la configurazione di uno spazio di intersoggettività in cui si materializza l'atto di lettura e si attualizzano appercezioni precedentemente condizionate da molteplici fattori diversi. La sequenza di decodifica e ricodifica dei segni grafici e la sorprendente evidenza del processo visivo bidirezionale occhio-cervello hanno evidenziato l'importanza cognitiva delle anomalie linguistiche e paradigmatiche.

In questo modo, abbiamo proposto la nostra teoria delle appercezioni del fantastico come un legame che può emergere attraverso anomalie, alterazioni e trasgressioni a qualsiasi livello cognitivo coinvolto nella lettura, offrendo anche uno schema analitico di indagine che ci permette di analizzare i testi narrativi. Proprio attraverso l'analisi di alcuni casi concreti riteniamo dimostrato il ruolo che le appercezioni svolgono nella creazione dei legami fantastici.

Non c'è dubbio che le varie questioni sollevate in questo articolo –che rimane a tutti gli effetti uno studio introduttivo sulla questione– dovranno essere approfondite, ma crediamo che l'approccio cognitivo proposto ci permetta, attraverso il

sequenziamento dei testi e l'analisi del tipo di legame che si instaura come modifica nelle appercezioni tra il lettore e il testo, di superare e incanalare in modo costruttivo il dibattito sullo statuto generico o sulla configurazione come modalità narrativa che hanno afflitto la critica legata al fantastico degli ultimi cinquanta anni. Rimane, certo, da approfondire l'analisi di altri testi per evidenziare come i legami fantastici plasmino la lettura e l'interpretazione di diverse narrazioni, così come rimangono aperte per ricerche future la possibile differenziazione cognitiva dei legami tra realismo magico e narrazioni fantastiche e l'evoluzione del fantastico nella narrativa italiana degli ultimi decenni, con la proposta di ampliare il possibile raggio d'azione dei legami fantastici a testi narrativi più lunghi e articolati come ad esempio nei romanzi riconducibili al *New Italian Epic*.

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Fantastično v telesu in umu: teorija apercepcij.
Opredelitev in uporaba pri Dinu Buzzatiju, Giuseppeju Genni in Micheleju Mariju

V tem članku predstavljamo novo teorijo fantastičnega, imenovano teorija apercepcij, s katero poskušamo združiti dva različna znanstvena dialoga.

Ob upoštevanju raziskav zadnjih desetletij na področju kognitivnih in kognitivnih literarnih študij (CLS) - utelešena simulacija, zrcalni nevroni, intersubjektivnost, intersekvencionalnost - opredeljujemo fantastično kot povezavo, ki se lahko pojavi zaradi spremembe naših jezikovnih, pripovednih in paradigmatskih apercepcij kot anomalija, sprememba ali transgresija vsaj ene od kognitivnih ravni, ki delujejo v vsaki pripovedni izkušnji.

Ključne besede: fantastično, kognitivna znanost, apercepcije, utelešena simulacija, Michele Mari

The Fantastic in Body and Mind: The Apperceptions Theory. Definition and Applications in Dino Buzzati, Giuseppe Genna and Michele Mari

With this paper we present a new theory of the fantastic called apperception theory, by connecting two distinct scientific dialogues.

Considering the research of the last decades in cognitive science and *Cognitive Literary Studies* (CLS) –embodied simulation, mirror neurons, intersubjectivity, intersequentiality– we define the fantastic as the linkage that can emerge from a modification of our linguistic, narrative and paradigmatic apperceptions as an anomaly, alteration or transgression of at least one of the cognitive levels that operate in any narrative experience.

At the same time we offer an analytical scheme of fantastic narrative texts, an alternative in the dual debate between the fantastic as a literary genre (Todorov) and the fantastic as a narrative mode that exploits specific mechanisms *to force* other kinds of text (Bessière). The cognitive approach allows for the development of apperception theory, in order to identify the degree and depth of fantastic linkages that emerge from apperceptive connections.

Keywords: fantastic, cognitive science, apperception, embodied simulation, Michele Mari