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PARTICIPATORY CULTURE IN THE DIGITAL AGE
MEMEIFYING KING CHARLES' CORONATION

Abstract

The digital age enabled people worldwide to connect and form what media scholars call a 'participatory culture' – a network of individuals that unrestrictedly share and interact with each other's cultural and media productions. This form of culture encompasses memes and, more precisely, 'image macros,' i.e. pictures with a text caption superimposed on them. My analysis of memes (used synonymously with 'image macros') is placed in the context of the British Royal Family. Specifically, a case study is conducted on memes that emerged with King Charles' coronation, on a corpus formed of ten image macros collected from online social platforms seven months after the enthronement. This study's aim is to uncover how memes act as a reputable form of participatory culture in this particular cultural context. Ultimately, memes prove to be a collective exercise in meaning-making from which shared cultural narratives stem. They are instrumental in disseminating news and popularizing politics while, at the same time, granting basic principles of grassroots democracy.

With a long-standing tradition, the British Monarchy is a renowned institution, "central to the British Constitution" (Sawicka & Sawczuk, 2022: 107). Ever evolving and changing to adapt to Great Britain's needs, which is still largely considered "a nation of royalists" (Serhan, 2022), the British Monarchy's role nowadays is primarily concerned with ceremonial duties (Sawicka and Sawczuk, 2022: 109; Owens, 2015: 13): "as the monarchy evolved over hundreds of years, the ruler's role has become largely symbolic" (Wood, 2020). Even though facing a "lack of political power" (Serhan, 2022), the British Royal Family (BRF) is at the forefront of the nation, "[providing] a sense of solidarity and national identity" (Mamchii, 2023). Their actions attract public attention "from both domestic and foreign audiences" (Mamchii, 2023), sparking worldwide reactions.

The public coronation of King Charles III, on the sixth of May, 2023, was no different. Just a day later, the Guardian published an article, mentioning that the coronation "prompted mixed reactions" (Burke, 2023). Most surprisingly, the King's accession to the throne gave rise to "[hundreds] of priceless memes [that] flooded the internet as the lavish ceremony at Westminster Abbey took place" (Web Desk, 2023). Certainly, "[the] era when the royals were generally respected by the public and when it was not that easy to make fun of them is long gone," asserts Šonková (2014: 36) in relation to the new humorous ways of portraying the BRF in the media.

The present paper, in the field of media and cultural studies, looks into the way in which memes, as a form of participatory culture, contribute to the creation of a shared cultural narrative and help news dissemination, ultimately acting as a soft power tool for the BRF. As such, closer attention is paid to recently-emerged memes

surrounding King Charles' coronation, with a focus on their contribution to discourses on and the public image of the BRF worldwide.

The concept of 'memes' was introduced by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins in his book, *The Selfish Gene* (1976). It was used to describe "a cultural unit (or idea) that sought replication for the purpose of its own survival," usually perceived as virulent or selfish (Wiggins and Bowers 2014: 4). Nonetheless, this Darwinian acceptation of the word has shifted over time, and, within the digital age, it was conducive to the coinage of 'internet memes' – essentially, still "[units] of cultural transmission" (Castaño, 2013: 84), but lacking the negative connotations ascribed to the original term. Researchers point out that "[roughly] speaking, an internet meme is a phrase, image or video [that] can be created or based on a real life event that spreads through the internet causing people to replicate it" (Castaño, 2013: 96). This present analysis employs the word 'meme' to describe this specialized usage (that of 'internet memes'), as hijacked forms of the original concept:

> Instead of mutating by random chance, before spreading by a form of Darwinian selection, internet memes are altered deliberately by human creativity. In the hijacked version, mutations are designed—not random—with the full knowledge of the person doing the mutating. (Dawkins cited in Wiggins and Bowers 2014: 6)

As such, memes, in the digital space, can take "the form of an image, hyperlink, video, website or hashtag" (Akhther, 2021: 3) that spreads rapidly and is consciously and deliberately altered by 'prosumers' – a term that simultaneously describes and blurs the lines between consumers and producers (Akhther, 2021: 3).

Moreover, consensus among researchers points to the fact that "Internet memes exist as artifacts of participatory digital culture" (Akhther, 2021: 5), which is a form of culture in the online space where individuals are prompted and encouraged to creatively engage with already-existing or content of their own. In this type of culture, artistic expression and civic engagement are not conditioned (the aesthetic standards are virtually non-existent) and knowledge is imparted from the ones in the know to novices (Jenkins qtd. in Wiggins and Bowers, 2014: 6). Ultimately, memes "[provide] a powerful new way to combine a few things such as creativity, art, message, and humor in the internet culture" (Akhther, 2021: 6).

In what follows, a case study is conducted on memes that emerged during and after King Charles' coronation. Content analysis on memes – particularly, on 'image macros,' i.e. Internet artifacts where a humorous caption or catchphrase is digitally superimposed on a photographic image (Akhther, 2021: 5), – that feature and re-appropriate his public figure is performed with the view of uncovering their effects and evolution in the digital space.

Firstly, in the case of King Charles' throne succession, as well as in the case of many other topical events, memes become a means of information dissemination,

Figure 1. Instagram @_.aryaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa._

Figure 2. Instagram @farahsharghi

acting as "visual news sources, effectively transmitting information across platforms and to users" (Scanlon, 2020). On the same day as the coronation, UK *Daily Mail* newspaper published an article entitled "King Charles reading Harry's tell-all book *Spare* in the Abbey? Social media jokers doctor Coronation pictures as *hilarious memes sweep the internet*" (Goss and Salvoni, 2023, italics mine). Although lacking statistical evidence on this particular case, it can only be inferred that memes on and about the coronation 'sweeping the internet' reached audiences not only to entertain, but also to inform (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). This is particularly so in the case of younger generations of internet users, with researchers suggesting that "memes are successfully engaging a generation of younger people in politics and world events," according to "York Student's Dissertation a 'First' on Memes" (2017) article. By far and large, "the share of UK adults who get their news from social media has peaked at 49% already back in 2019, according to Ofcom data" and "[according] to a recent social media behavior survey conducted by YPulse, 75% of users aged 13–36 regularly share memes, and 30% of these users share memes daily" (Kraynov, 2022). To no surprise, King Charles' coronation was hailed and made known on the internet, also with a touch of humor, since memes provide a humorous, entertaining, and informative medium for individuals to engage with content without dedicating excessive time to the task (Kraynov, 2022).

Secondly, emergent memes on King Charles' coronation make the point that image macros can represent an alternative and more alluring way of audiences engaging with content on politics. A recent study shows that "[regarding] political contexts, [its] participants noted that humor could bring people to interact with serious topics in a light-hearted way" (Leiser, 2022: 244). Certainly, "[particularly] for those who struggle to engage with serious topics, humor can provide relief and make political content more pleasurable […] memes [thereby providing] a gateway to political topics" (Leiser, 2022: 237). This suggests that memes, particularly image macros, have the potential to serve as a bridge between entertainment and politics,

attracting a wider audience and encouraging engagement with important issues, such as King Chales' throne succession.

What is more, disseminating news and popularizing politics, memes also help create a shared cultural narrative. Research claims that "political memes provide identification with users who hold similar worldviews" and "[the] recurring elements of memes may hereby function as a meme language and provide common ground for users from various backgrounds" (Leiser, 2022: 247). These image macros, circulating in the online, very much feature the same discursive devices as narrations (i.e. characters, plot, setting), and, through people widely-engaging with them, shape collective perceptions, reinforce cultural norms, and facilitate a sense of shared identity. For example, extensive critique was sparked by Camilla being crowned next to King Charles. The highly-ironic memes (see Figure 3 and Figure 4) created reflect this shared cultural narrative of rejection and dislike towards her public figure, since "memes [are linked] to societal impact by explaining how they reflect the views of the masses" (Leiser, 2022: 245).

Figure 3. Pinterest @boredpanda

Figure 4. Pinterest @boredpanda

Most importantly, memes on the sixth of May's coronation are indicative of high-functioning democracy in Great Britain. Creating, engaging with and circulating around memes on King Charles' enthronement, even though highly-satirical (see Figures 4 and 6), serves as a proof that Britons benefit from unrestricted artistic expression and free speech. These fundamentally democratic values are all reinforced by the emergence of memes surrounding the event that took place at Westminster Abbey: "internet memes constitute a peculiar expression of the involvement of their authors in the public issues" (Akhther, 2021: 7). According to Leiser's study (2022: 245), "[the] power of memes was seen to lie in them as the voice of the people, as an element of grassroots democracy." As a result, memes can foster a more inclusive platform by offering a common area where humor and important
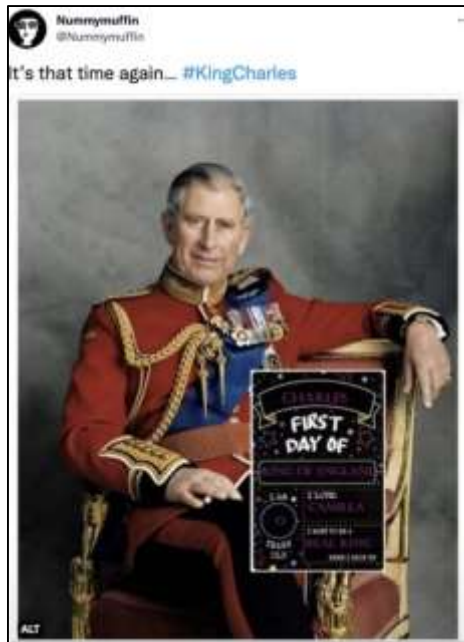
Figure 5. Pinterest @letseatcake

Figure 6. Pinterest @letseatcake

political issues can collide, enticing a variety of audiences to actively engage in conversations about King Charles' coronation and more general political narratives.

Last but not least, the image macros circulating on the World Wide Web with the occasion of King Charles' succession to the throne "reflect the current media flow of content usually dominated by English-speaking and American popular cultural references" (Bojczuk, 2018: 18). Illustratively enough, the 'disinterested king' meme (Figure 7 and Figure 9) permeated even the Romanian-speaking cultural landscape (Figure 8 and Figure 10), proving the widespread accessibility of internet memes, especially those pertaining to English-speaking countries.

Figure 7. Original 'disinterested king' meme from Imgflip.com

Figure 8. Reiteration of 'disinterested king' meme from ebaumsworld.com

Figure 9. Reiteration of 'disinterested king' meme from ebaumsworld.com

Figure 10. Romanian meme featuring 'disinterested king' image. Instagram

To sum up, funny and ironic memes on King Charles' coronation make the point that image macros, in particular, prove to be highly efficient when it comes to disseminating news and popularizing politics. Meme creation in the digital space remains as a beacon of democracy and inclusiveness and allows people to contribute with their own take on events in online debates on topical issues. This participatory culture formed around memes is, moreover, instrumental to creating and shaping a sense of shared identity, a shared cultural narrative that mirrors masses perception of the 2023 May's coronation.

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BOOKTOK
THE PROMOTER OF "FAST FASHION" IN LITERATURE

Abstract

The purpose of my study is to show how BookTok affects the way books are published nowadays and the influence that this community has in literature. This will be done by comparing and contrasting elements of the novels presented on BookTok with what the term "fast fashion" means. There is a tendency for these books to follow certain trends that are circulating in today's literature that makes them popular. Therefore, this popularity encourages other writers to create narratives that are very similar in order to have their own success. This can lead to the possible loss of diversity in literature, due to the fact that there is a tendency of not promoting what does not fit a certain pattern.

Introduction

Nowadays people take recommendations for various aspects of their lives from different social media platforms. The advice can be about serious things, like career changes or family matters, to more light-hearted ones, such as hobbies and free time. In those cases, social media can offer plenty of information and inspiration which awaits the user within just a simple search. When it comes to literature and book recommendations there is no difference. Avid and casual readers rely not only on friends and acquaintances to discover new titles, but also on social media in order to find the next best novel to keep them entertained. One social media platform that is used regularly for book recommendations and has an entire community dedicated to this is TikTok, more exactly BookTok. My interest in this specific app began with a previous research which was focused on how this community promotes a lot of novels that are centered around toxic relationships. But after concluding my past research, there was a surge of users that used the term 'fast fashion' in describing what books are recommended on BookTok, which made me conduct research on this community from another perspective. As a result, this paper will focus on how BookTok, through what book recommendations pushes more for the app users, creates a phenomenon similar to what fast fashion generated in the clothing industry. For achieving this, I will compare and contrast the novels on BookTok with the definition of the term 'fast fashion.'

TikTok, BookTok and fast fashion

TikTok is a platform that became very popular because of its short-form content. This means that people that use this platform can scroll from just a few minutes to maybe

even hours and they will always find something different every few seconds. Furthermore, as its own advertisement points out, on the app "there's something for everyone" and the content that appears on the 'for you page' – the main page of the app, abbreviated as fyp – for each and every user on TikTok is "customized specifically for you" (TikTok, 2014). These aspects of the app are important in order to understand not only how it works, but also to see the mechanisms behind it. They show why it attracts so many users and it may stand as a theory for why it was necessary for the communities to appear. One group of people that was formed on this social media platform was BookTok, which is focused on literature. The name is formed very simply, by combining the name of people's interest with 'Tok,' a process that is done in forming all the communities' name on this app.

Moving on, if we take a look at the definition provided by the Merriam-Webster dictionary, fast fashion can be understood as "an approach to the design, creation, and marketing of clothing fashions that emphasizes making fashion trends quickly and cheaply available to consumers" (2024). If we take this into consideration when we are looking at what the TikTok app provides for its users, we can see some similarities. Like in fashion, there are trends and they can change rapidly because of the multitude of content that is produced every day. Moreover, to the process of making the video we can apply the three main things as found in the definition. As a creator, you need to design your next upload, create it in such a way that will attract viewership and then market it.

The relationship between novels on BookTok and fast fashion

Taking from the definition the three key terms of fast fashion and applying them to the novels that are mostly promoted on BookTok, I came up with a system of classification. Firstly, we will talk about the design of the covers and then we will move to the creation of those novels, where we will talk about some 'recycled' elements that appear frequently. Finally, the marketing aspect will be discussed not only in correlation with the app, but also how it affects outside of it in the stores and even in the publishing industry.

Design

When it comes to the covers design, there is a pattern that can be observed at the novels presented in BookTok. They can be categorized also, with the first category being the novels that have similar covers to the one from Figure 1 in the Appendices 1. These types of covers have bright colors that often attract the attention of the viewers/ potential buyers. In some cases, there is a small object that symbolizes something specific from the novel, or in other cases there are two people drawn, who represent the main couple of the story.

Covers that are like the one in Figure 2 in the Appendices 1 are the ones attributed to the dark romance genre. As it can be seen, the cover adopts a darker theme, including a skull, spider webs and the color red, referring most of the times to blood. The elements of the cover can very here in the sense that it may include other elements that make the reader think about something 'dark', such as snakes and skull animals, or other colors that are complementary with black, such as green or purple.

If we take a look at the last cover, the one in the Figure 3, we can see what I would like to call the dinosaur of the romance genre and namely the naked person on the cover. It usually represents a man that is naked from the waist up and he has a six pack. Other variation of this type of cover can be with a female in lingerie or a couple.

Creation

As I mentioned before, in the creation process there are some elements that are used over and over again in the novels promoted on BookTok. I choose six elements that I consider to be important in this regarded and they will be my focus in this section. Firstly, the *title* is usually something that attracts the viewer/ the possible future reader and can hint to the relationship between the two main characters – *Haunting Adeline* – or has a sense of fatalism – *It Ends With Us* – that sparks curiosity.

Tropes also play a role in the popularity and the promotion of these novels. The writers use over and over again the most beloved tropes by readers, such as enemies to lovers, grumpy x sunshine, the second chance romance. These are some of the most prevalent tropes that I encountered during my stay on BookTok, but there are many more tropes that are overused.

The *plot* in these novels is usually moving very fast, the two main characters do not have a chance to take a break. It is usually filled with *fights* that are of different nature: an ex came back, there is an unwanted pregnancy, she is too good for him, his mom does not like her and so on and so forth. There is a multitude of ups and downs and between them we have the *sexual tension* or just simply *sex scenes* that spices up the whole action of the book. And after all of these things, there is always the *happily ever after ending* that resolves everything between the two lovers.

Marketing

In the case of marketing, we are going to talk about two aspects: marketing on BookTok and then how this promoting goes outside of the app and reaches bookshops. In the first instance, as it is exemplified in Appendices 2, the marketing is done by adding a scene from the book, put in a slideshow most of the time – *Figure 4, 5, 6* –, that would spark the interest of the viewers, which is supplemented by photos and a song that match the text. Moreover, in some instances, at the end of the

video or the slideshow, there is a screenshot mostly from Amazon, in order for viewers to see where they can buy it, as can be seen from *Figure 7*.

In Appendices 3 it can be seen how BookTok made the transition to bookshops. In *Figure 8* there is a photo of a stand that displays books that are popular in this TikTok community. This can help customers to find more quickly the physical copies of the ones that were recommended for them. Also, on the cover of these novels there can be found stamps such as the one in *Figure 9*, that indicates the popularity of it on BookTok. Even the online shops have banners/ hyperlinks that help customers find more easily what they are looking for.

What are the effects?

Popularity on BookTok can be transformed very easily into sales for the authors. Two relevant examples are *It Ends with Us* by Colleen Hoover and *Song of Achilles* by Madeline Miller. The first example, which I used before in my previous research, but not from the point of view of the marketing strategy, is a book that was published in 2016 – selling only 17,000 copies/ week and then the number of sales decreased – but found its success – in 2021 it got to an average of 29,000 copies/ week – only after it reemerged on BookTok (Stewart, 2021). In addition, there needs to be mentioned the fact that the article was published in September 2021, so the year was not even finished yet and it had this many sales. In the case of *Song of Achilles* by Madeline Miller, the year gap is even greater, because the book was first published in 2011 (Miller, 2011). Roberts points out that after it became popular on TikTok, the novel had an increase in sales by 240 percent (Roberts qtd. in Kirby, 2023).

On the other hand, not all readers are excited about the recommendations on BookTok. This happens because the books that are mostly promoted in the community follow the patterns that I presented previously, which leads to dullness in what is published. It can be expected because this is what its sales mostly, so writers and publishers want or need this money in order to continue their work. Like in fast fashion, what is in trend must be exploited at a maximum capacity, so the narratives that follow the successful pattern are pushed more to the public. But as @gabesco, a reader that enjoys classic novels, pointed out in his video, most of the books which are recommended when you look for your next reading are the ones that I described before. Not only this, but as Yu asserts, there is a certain "quantity over quality" (2024), which can lead to the texts to be not as proofread as they should. In her study, Conti actually found "misspelled words and trivial errors" in popular novels on BookTok, showcasing once again that, like in fast fashion, things are done as quickly as possible.

Conclusion

Finally, I can assert the fact that what BookTok does with its recommendations can be called a way of fast fashion in the literature. It tends to create a space and a place where views and sales are more important than diversity. Furthermore, the community dictates what has priority in the publishing area. A possible limitation of this study can be the fact that I do not have exact data on publishing houses and what books they published, but I want to reiterate that my research has as a central point BookTok and the community as a promoter of fast fashion literature.

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Appendices 1

Figure 1. Cover It Ends With Us by Colleen Hoover (Amazon.com, 2024b)

Figure 2. Cover Haunting Adeline by H.D. Carlton (Amazon.com, 2024a)
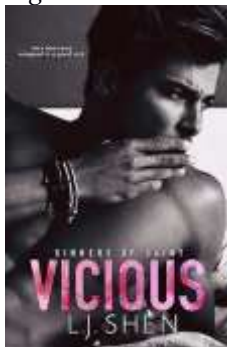
Figure 3. Cover Vicious by L.J. Shen (Amazon.com, 2024c)

Appendices 2

Figure 4,5,6. Example of marketing on BookTok (Livelybooker, 2024)

Figure 7. Further exemplification of marketing on BookTok (Thee.reading.mom, 2023)

Appendices 3

Figure 8. BookTok stand in a bookshop (Goulet, 2022)

Figure 9. Sign that this book is promoted on BookTok (photo by me, 2023)

Figure 10. BookTok banner on the online shop Okian (screenshot by me, 2023)

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THE (UN)RELIABLE FIRST-PERSON NARRATOR IN *RUMANIA AND THE WAR* AND *TWENTY YEARS IN ROUMANIA*

Abstract

This paper investigates the concept of unreliable first-person narration in Nicholas Lupu's *Rumania and the War* and Maude Rea Parkinson's *Twenty Years in Roumania*, within the framework of Comparative Literature. Employing Claudio Guillen's definition of Comparative Literature, it explores the narrative techniques employed by Lupu and Parkinson, focusing on the manipulation of perspective and emotional implication. Making use of literary criticism from Wayne Booth and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, it shows that both works have unreliable narrators due to personal bias and subjective interpretation. It also acknowledges the possibility of interpreting these works as memoirs, thereby accepting their subjectivity. By analyzing language patterns and narrative strategies, this paper illustrates how the authors strategically influence the reader's perception of reliability, ultimately challenging readers to critically engage with the complexities of narrative construction and historical representation.

This paper delves into the realm of Comparative Literature, which is conventionally perceived as the study that systematically examines writings that go beyond national boundaries, as Claudio Guillen explains in *The Challenge of Comparative Literature* (1993). Nicholas Lupu's work *Rumania and the War* (1919) and Maude Rea Parkinson's work *Twenty Years in Roumania* (1921) are exemplifications of the use of the literary device of perspective, respectively of trustworthy and untrustworthy narration. This paper aims to demonstrate that the first-person narrator is unreliable in the chosen works.

Before establishing the definition of a first-person narrator, we shall indicate what the term "narrator" refers to. The term "narrator" can be simply defined as "the person who tells the story in a book or in a play" (Longman Dictionary, 2024). A "first-person narrator" is conventionally defined as the instance where "in a first-person narrative, the narrator speaks as I, and is to a greater or lesser degree a participant in the story" (Abrams and Harpham, 2008: 272). In *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1991), Wayne Booth is the first to submit the critical concepts of the reliable and unreliable narrator. Booth defines these two terms of this binary opposition by comparing them: "For lack of better terms, I have called a narrator reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms), unreliable when he does not" (1987: 158-9). Booth's definition is thought to be incomplete by some literary critics, to leave no space for ambiguity and interpretation. We shall then take into consideration the definition proposed by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, in her work *Narrative Fiction* (1983), where

she clearly states that a reliable narrator is one who offers a narrative that it is to be accepted by the reader as an accurate representation of the fictional reality, as opposed to an unreliable narrator whose rendering is to be suspected by the reader. She concedes that it is easy to negatively define reliability by the absence of the signs of unreliability (1983: 100).

After reading the two literary works by Lupu and Parkinson, we as readers could argue that in both works we encounter a narrator characterized by unreliability, because of their emotional implication and subjectivity which alter the so-called and expected reliable narration. In both works, we come across sentences that claim an objective perspective, but on further reading we discover paragraphs that demonstrate the dishonesty of the narrators. For example, in the first chapter of Nicholas Lupu's book, it is stated that the purpose of the work is to clarify the conditions of Rumania's tragedy (Lupu 1919: 14), but its reliability is abolished when we come across paragraphs that are marked by personal opinions, and experiences, such as:

> I shall never forget how in 1913, during the Rumanian campaign in Bulgaria, when I was the chief physician of a hospital for cholera of 3,000 beds in barracks at Zimnicen, Queen Marie was the first to enter fearlessly the barracks of my patients to give them assistance and encourage them, and she never forgot to leave flowers behind when she left. (Lupu 1919: 18)

This eradication is present in *Twenty Years in Roumania* as well. The narrator states at some point that there have been some precautions taken in order not to offend the Roumanian people, that some pages which were written with pleasure were abandoned in order not to upset them (Parkinson, 1921: 21), but while reading the work we run into sentences that are a pillar of the thesis of the unreliable narrator. To exemplify, I shall paraphrase a sentence in which it is understood that when the author came into Romania there was a sign of alarm, of caution due to its preconceived beliefs (Parkinson, 1921: 6). Dealing with an American perspective, and with a British one, we shall see how the authors construct the narrations to make us label them both as unreliable.

On one hand, what can make us readers affirm that both *Rumania and The War* and *Twenty Years in Roumania* have untrustworthy narrators is the implicit ideas of personal bias, and emotional implications that we seem to perceive, or which we are made to think that we perceive them from the narrative. A first-person point of view is defined as "[t]his mode, insofar as it is consistently carried out, limits the matter of the narrative to what the first person-narrator knows, experiences, infers, or finds out by talking to other characters" (Abrams and Harpham, 2008: 270). While reading the above-mentioned works, we face this tendency to question the narrators' credibility. We might perceive the narrators as being untrustworthy because of their personal biases. This collocation, made of the terms *personal*, i.e., "relating or belonging to a single or particular person rather than to a group or an organization" (Cambridge

Dictionary, 2024a) and *bias*, i.e. "the action of supporting or opposing a particular person or thing in an unfair way, because of allowing personal opinions to influence your judgment" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024b) can be defined by paraphrasing the two given definitions as "an individual's subjective inclination influenced by their feelings, opinions, or experiences; involving a deviation from impartial judgment, having its roots in personal beliefs, values, views" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024c). As it is illustrated in both works, first I would like to exemplify Nicholas Lupu's work which from the first chapter starts with a statement that promises objectivity regarding Rumania's conditions (Lupu, 1919: 14). This affirmation gives the reader the impression that they are about to read an essay made to be seen as objective, however further statements prove that there are clear signs of personal bias throughout the work. For instance, due to its direct implication and exposure to the events and effects of the war, as it is claimed throughout the book, the perspective offered on Rumania being at war is altered by personal experiences and beliefs, or at least it makes the reader believe so:

> Exanthematic typhoid, aggravated by starvation – I have myself seen whole army corps eating for weeks together only maize boiled in water – decimated both the army and the civilian population. (Lupu, 1919: 32)

The narration is constructed in the same way in Maude Rea Parkinson's book. The narrator has as their aim presenting Roumania, but they also indirectly recognize that the perspective we are going to get is influenced by their personal bias:

> During my long residence, I visited most parts of Roumania, some of them over and over again, and I think I may justly claim to have a very good knowledge of the country, of its physical features, its resources, and all the other information which one may find set forth, for the most part uninterestingly, in the geography books. It is only right that our ideas of Roumania should now assume a more definite and reliable shape, and I think that interest is at last being awakened regarding our brave little ally and all concerning her. I sincerely hope to interest my readers in the Roumanian people, and—though I am aware that I run a risk of becoming a little tedious—I feel it my duty to supply at the outset a slight sketch of the country which they inhabit. (Parkinson, 1921: 25)

Furthermore, another sign that indicates the narrator's unreliability is their emotional involvement. Due to the tone and focalization used, we are made to think of the events that are being told as being marked by emotional implications. We perceive emotional implication as "when the author implies without specifically delineating the emotional tonality (such as the intentions, motives, attitudes, and/or feelings) that gives rise to an experience or is engendered by one. The author does not tell, does not show; he or she expects" (Fleckenstein, 1995: 68). Comparable to Maude Parkinson's work, in *Rumania and The War* the events described are being presented by using words and tones that indicate what Gerald Genette explains in

Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method as being a voice that combines linguistic choices, attitudes, and a voice that is meant to manipulate the perspective, and even to evoke reactions from the readers (Genette, 1980: 220-225). An instance of this can be observed in the following passage:

> The cemetery in Jassy alone, a town of 70,000 people in normal times received that winter over 100,000 dead; over one-third of the medical staff (nearly three hundred doctors) succumbed to this terrible disease, and the whole population of some villages disappeared. It was desolation and misery in their blackest form. Notwithstanding all this, courage and hope were not entirely lost. (Lupu, 1919: 32)

In *Twenty Years in Roumania*, Maude Rea Parkinson stresses the focalization, rather than the tone. It might seem to the reader, that the narrator tries to emphasize the emotional implication in the narrative discourse:

> My heart has often been wrung by the accounts of the sufferings of my friends; but even during the darkest days of the war I was sustained by the knowledge that they never once lost courage. They displayed a spirit as indomitable as our own, and now I rejoice that their fiery trial is over, and that the dawn of a glorious day has arrived. (Parkinson ,1921: 6)

To put it simply, we can state that the first-person narrator is unreliable, but we can also claim that it is a literary technique, often called patterns in language that makes us readers label the narration as being unreliable, or reliable, depending on the author's intention.

On the other hand, the first-person narrators in Lupu's work *Rumania and the War* and Parkinson's work *Twenty Years in Roumania* can be thought of as trustworthy sources if we perceive the works as memoirs, implicitly accepting their subjectivity. In *A Glossary of Literary Terms Ninth Edition,* the term memoir clearly refers to work where "[t]he emphasis is not on the author's developing self but on the people and events that the author has known or witnessed" (Abrams and Harpham, 2008: 15). We might be tempted to consider these works memoirs because of the transparency of the first sentences of the essays, which give the reader an insight into how the idea of writing the essays was born, as can be seen in the following excerpts:

> Two years ago, when I was in London, I saw in a newspaper a sketch representing a newspaper boy in 1935 crying "Rumania coming in." That sketch depicted sarcastically the anxiety and the puzzled state of mind of the public as to the attitude of Rumania. From 1914 until 1916 Rumania was the political sphinx of the time. Is Rumania to come into the war? On whose side, and when? Why has she not yet come in? These questions remained unanswered. No one was able to say anything definite. (Lupu, 1919: 14)

> Now that I have set down in black and white these random impressions and recollections of a country in which I spent many of the happiest years of my life, a slight feeling of doubt assails me. Might my Romanian friends possibly find cause for offence in the freedom which I have allowed myself? Then I remember that they have a sense of humour, and the doubt vanishes. If I deal frankly with some of the methods and customs of the country, it is because I hope to give English readers an insight into the character of the people, and enable them to find there, as I have found, a very great deal to love. (Parkinson, 1921: 5)

The given quotes not only that demonstrate these works might be considered memoirs, but they also highlight the subjectivity of the books. A subjective work can be described as "one in which the author incorporates personal experiences, or projects into the narrative his other personal disposition, judgments, values, and feelings" (Abrams and Harpham, 2008: 233). At the same time, labelling a work as subjective or objective one is a mistake made by naïve readers. A work is not in itself a subjective or an objective, but in the way in which it is constructed, in the way in which it is built, in the way in which it is written, told, thought of. It is in the hands of the writer, respectively of the narrator to manipulate us and to lead us into thinking of a work as of a subjective or objective one, or of unreliable or reliable one. We have mentioned before the literary technique of patterns of language. This literary technique is, as Gerard Genette presents it in his work in the field of narratology and storytelling, represented by structures, motifs, and linguistic elements that combined make the construction of a narrative (1980: 220-225). It is not only about what meaning they convey, but rather about the effect of the conveyed meaning on the reader. In the two works, language patterns are chosen specifically to make the reader perceive them as memoirs. Therefore, we are manipulated to see the works as memoirs, as being subjective books. We are made to believe that if we see *Rumania and The War* and *Twenty Years in Roumania* as memoirs, we implicitly have to deal with a reliable first-person narrator, but we allow different voices, tones, and linguistic elements in the books to manipulate us into thinking so.

In brief, we started off with the intention of demonstrating that in the chosen works we deal with an untrustworthy first-person narrator. Despite being written from an American, respectively from a British perspective, it is easy to tell that there are similarities between them, but also a contrast. For instance, both works have a first person-narrative, but as we find out, a work can be both at the same time credible and untrustworthy, as William Riggan explained in his work *Picaros, Madmen, Naifs and Clowns. The Unreliable First-Person Narrator* "First-person narration is, then, always at least potentially unreliable, in that the narrator, with these human limitations of perception and memory and assessment, may easily have missed, forgotten, or misconstrued certain incidents, words, or motives" (1982: 19-20). It depends on the strategic placement of the language patterns that makes us readers consider them one way or another. Regarding the language patterns, a dissimilarity between them is that in *Rumania and The War* the stress is placed on the tone, on its

effects and expected reactions on the reader, while in *Twenty Years in Roumania*, the focalization is more highlighted, the one recurrent throughout the book being the internal one, the perspective being limited and focusing on its narrator. Both works are constructed in a manipulative way; they indirectly, intentionally, and subtly lead the readers into thinking of a work in one way or another. Strategically portraying a contradictory narrative voice, the selected works make readers realize that we cannot take words for what they are, we cannot take them for granted, because when there is a first-person narrative, the reliability or unreliability of the narrator, and how the narrator made us label or question its credibility will always be questions that will stick with us throughout the reading. As with many other historical fictional works, these essays should be taken with a pinch of salt.

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BEYOND WORDS
EDITH WHARTON'S CÉZANNESQUE BRUSHTROKES IN *SUMMER*

Abstract

In her 1925 essay "The Writing of Fiction" Edith Wharton reflects on the challenges of conveying "a fragment of life" through writing—a challenge underlying the concept of transpicturality. Within the pages of her 1917 novel *Summer*, Edith Wharton seems to blur the boundaries between text and painting, positioning the reader as a spectator, through a writing style reminiscent of Paul Cézanne's brushstrokes. The aim of this paper is to examine the emergence of a "pictorial third," as developed by Liliane Louvel, a space which readers access through a "voyure." Drawing on Jean-François Lyotard's words, this research work seeks to demonstrate that, in *Summer*, Edith Wharton "paints and draws with and within words."

Following in the footsteps of her close friend Henry James, who wrote "The Art of Fiction" in 1884, Edith Wharton published "The Writing of Fiction" in 1925. In this insightful essay, Wharton delves into the challenges involved in the writing process:

> The attempt to give back any fragment of life in painting or sculpture or music presupposes transposition, 'stylization.' To re-present in words is far more difficult, because the relation is so close between model and artist. (Wharton 1925: 16)

In that regard, Mikel Dufrenne explains that "the imaginary conjured up by writing tends to let itself be seen" (Dufrenne, 1975: 52, my translation). Liliane Louvel joins him in asserting that indeed sometimes the eye "sees double," (Louvel, 2010: 9, my translation) that reading always unfolds within a phenomenon of "voyure" between the text and the image (Louvel, 2010: 47). In the act of reading, the figural—the "experiencing a becoming-sense of forms" (Jenny, 1990: 26, my translation)—frequently gives rise to a "pictorial third" (Louvel, 2010: 9, my translation) which essentially allows the emergence of mental imagery within the reader's mind who becomes, in many respects, a spectator. In other words, it is not uncommon for painting to emerge from the text, transporting readers into a transpictorial space. Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to uncover "these traces, imprints, and manifestations of a presence of painting as a palimpsest that endlessly 'returns' to the literary text, animating it, or at least making it move" (Louvel, 2010: 101, my translation) by analyzing Wharton's overlooked 1917 novel *Summer* and its relationship with Cézanne's vivid brushstrokes. Wharton's admiration for the French painter—she even had acquired one of his lush landscapes (Orlando, 2012: 186)—manifests itself through her own writing. But some questions remain: *How* does Wharton transform words into vivid mental images for readers using the Cézanne's

post-impressionist technique? *How* does she offer readers a "fragment of life" in *Summer*? Borrowing from Lyotard's words, how does she paint "with and within words?" (Lyotard, 1971: 53, my translation). To answer those questions, this paper will focus on the way Wharton depicts the Mountain and its surroundings, from the very beginning to the end of the novel. In that effort, this paper will demonstrate that Wharton's novel illustrates both Cézanne's *synthetic* (1895-1906) and *couillarde* (1862-1872) periods, by taking both a thematic and a meta-literary approach.

In many respects Cézanne's synthetic paintings resemble sketches, much like numerous early passages in Wharton's novel. Wendelin A. Guentner defines the sketch as a "centripetal fragment" (Guentner, 1984: 27, my translation) inviting the viewer to interpret, to transcend the given: the sketch is always a promise made to the imagination (Guentner, 1984: 28). But above all, the sketch is a description, a proposition that emits a certain energy which penetrates the reader, or rather the spectator. Even though *Summer* is not strictly a sketch, it consumes as such. From the first pages of her novel, Wharton meticulously sketches a nameless Mountain, drawing inspiration from Cézanne's technique, particularly evident in *Montagne Sainte-Victoire* (see Figure 1).

Figure 5 Cézanne, P. (1888-1890) *Mont Sainte-Victoire*. Wikimedia Commons [public domain].

The inarticulateness Charity experiences when laying in the grass (Wharton, 2019: 9) echoes Cézanne's post-impressionist brushstrokes, thus forcing the spectator to articulate, to invest energy in bringing order to disorder. As Wharton describes on page three:

> The Mountain was a good fifteen miles away, but it rose so abruptly from the lower hills that it seemed almost to cast its shadow over North Dormer. And it was like a great magnet drawing the clouds and scattering them in storm across the valley. (Wharton, 2019: 3)

Although she introduces it at the beginning of her sentence, Wharton also places the mountain in the background ("a good fifteen miles away"). However, like Cézanne

who blurs the outlines, Wharton specifies that the mountain is still implicitly interacting with the rest of the scenery: it is capable of rising ("it rose so abruptly") and almost of transcending its geographical position to extend over the village ("it seemed almost to cast its shadow over North Dormer"). Wharton's use of the verb 'to seem' gives an *impression*—a verb not without resonance with the verb 'to seam,' which, in turn, invites precisely to assemble the different parts of the landscape. This desire to convey articulation through approximation (the figural tension between 'to seem' and 'to seam') which conditions perception is, according to Merleau-Ponty, what makes Cézanne's technique so unique:

> He [Cézanne] is not interested in separating the fixed things that appear before our eyes from the elusive way in which they appear; he wants to paint matter in the process of taking shape, order emerging through spontaneous organization. (1948: 20, my translation)

Similarly, in her portrayal of the Mountain, Wharton also accounts for the complementarity of objects in the process of perception: both the Whartonian and the Cézannesque mountains interact with the rest of the landscape in a very post-impressionist style. As Cézanne sprinkles black tones on his canvas to create a perspective effect, Wharton mentions the shadow areas projected by the Mountain. Wharton adds depth to her text by capitalizing the letter 'M' in "Mountain," almost positioning it as a graphic representation of the Mountain peaks. Suddenly, the word "Mountain"—as the 'M' seems to elevate above the other letters—transforms into this very mountain capable of growing and shrinking, of casting its darkness over the landscape, over the text. These visual details contribute to the blurring of the boundary between text and post-impressionist painting and thus to the "aesthetic-semantic process" (Jenny, 1990: 14, my translation) which characterizes the figural event. Borrowing from Mikel Dufrenne's words: "the typographical device itself can explode: writing abolishes itself to become... something like painting" (Dufrenne, 1975: 42, my translation). Furthermore, by using the phrase "it was like," Wharton further reinforces the liminal character of her discourse—the condition of the figural event. Wharton's intent lies not merely in providing a concrete description of what Charity sees, but rather in prompting readers to actively engage in constructing the landscape themselves, to catch a glimpse of it; in other words, *Summer* invites readers to energetically participate in the construction of the narrative. Therefore, when the Mountain is "drawing the clouds," in some way, the polysemy of the word reveals the sketch-like quality of Wharton's writing.

But Wharton's writing is even more reminiscent of Cézanne's post-impressionist technique through her use of synesthesia and hypotyposis. Wharton skillfully introduces readers with her protagonist by highlighting the finesse of her senses in a passage bordering on hyperesthesia:

> She loved the roughness of the dry mountain grass under her palms, the smell of the

thyme into which she crushed her face, the fingering of the wind in her hair and through her cotton blouse, and the creak of the larches as they swayed to it. (Wharton 2019: 8)

The harmony of the passage is rendered by a sequel of assonances ("loved"/ "roughness"'; "grass"/ "palms"; "fingering"/ "wind") and consonances ("smell"/ "thyme;" "which"/ "she"/ "crushed"; "creak"/ "larches") which engenders an *impression* of natural reality: textual reality becomes a fictive sound, quasi-audible, quasi-perceptible. The creak of the larches in the wind acts as a metonymy that implies visual movement and as an onomatopoeia that reveals the auditory quality of Wharton's vocabulary: sound, sight and touch intertwine, as in Cézanne's painting. But synesthesia and hypotyposis are all the more emphasized on page 27:

> Directly in her line of vision a blackberry branch laid its frail white flowers and blue-green leaves against the sky. Just beyond, a tuft of sweet-fern uncurled between the beaded shoots of the grass, and a small yellow butterfly vibrated over them like a fleck of sunshine. This was all she saw; but she felt, above her and about her, the strong growth of the beeches clothing the ridge, the rounding of pale green cones on countless spruce-branches, the push of myriads of sweet-fern fronds in the cracks of the stony slope below the wood, and the crowding shoots of meadowsweet and yellow flags in the pasture beyond (Wharton, 2019: 27).

Liliane Louvel aptly notes that hypotyposis "paints things in such a vivid and energetic way that it somehow places them before the eyes, transforming a narrative or description into an image, a painting, or even a living scene" (Louvel, 1998: 79, my translation). Through Wharton's hypotyposis, more than ever, the scene seems to unfold before the reader-spectators' eyes: the *voyure* takes place. It is as if Cézanne's painting were emerging from the text: the transition from what Charity "saw" to what she "felt" is symptomatic of the post-impressionist nature of Wharton's writing. And this transition is marked by a semicolon: a punctuation of the liminal, between the period and the comma, between seeing and feeling. It is noteworthy that the semicolon resembles a wave, or one might even say a brushstroke in the text. Through this hypotyposis, touch penetrates sight ("the beaded shoots of the grass"), as does sound ("a small yellow butterfly vibrated over them like a fleck of sunshine") and scent ("white flowers"). Wharton gives texture and depth to her text, as evidenced by the paronomasia "above her and about her:" suddenly everything blends together, yet the scene remains perceptible. Wharton, as Cézanne, also plays with colors to harmonize her canvas-page: the "blue-green leaves" blend with the blue of the sky, as well as with the "pale green cones on countless spruce-branches," and the yellow of the sun is transposed onto the butterfly, but also onto the "flags in the pasture beyond." As Merleau-Ponty said about Cézanne's colors: "every color we see in nature provokes, by a sort of backlash, the vision of the complementary color, and these complements are heightened" (1948: 18, my translation). The process

of color complementarity also manifests in Wharton's literary brush, where synesthesia once again emerges as the sight of colors merges with sound. Readers can almost hear the rounding of the "green cones on countless spruce-branches:" the succession of long vowels conveys an almost infinite movement as indicated by the word "countless," and thus, sound conveys a landscape stretching endlessly, a landscape forming itself before the eyes of both Charity and readers.

As the novel nears its conclusion, Wharton draws closer to what scholars commonly refer to as Cézanne's *couillarde* period. This phase of his life—heavily influenced by the frightening works of Francisco Goya—was notably darker, characterized by his use of painting knives and a palette saturated with deep, terrific hues. As Charity Royall finds herself pregnant by Lucius Harney, who has left her to marry Annabel Bach, a girl deemed more socially acceptable in his eyes, the novel takes on a darker tone. Charity, in her despair, decides to retreat to the Mountain only to find desolation and death. But once again, Wharton impressionistically projects these currents of emotion onto a most abject landscape. Thus, on the journey to reunite with a mother she is on the verge of becoming, everything seems to disintegrate into an increasingly estranging scenery: "The long road and the cloudy landscape vanished from her eyes, and for a time she seemed to be circling about in some terrible wheeling darkness. Then that too faded" (Wharton, 2019: 132). Here, the narrator adopts an aesthetic of effacement, driven by a frenetic darkness that whirls *in vacuo*. The term "faded" precisely captures the effect achieved by Cézanne's nearly stump-like technique in his painting *The Murder* (see Figure 2).

Figure 6 Cézanne, P. (1870) *The Murder*. Wikimedia Commons [public domain].

The darkness that envelops the Mountain becomes oppressive, clouding Charity's sight as she struggles to recognize the miserable figures seated around the table—figures that, like the victim in *The Murder*, distort themselves: "He held a match to the candle, and in a moment or two a faint circle of light fell on the pale aguish heads that started out of the shadow like the heads of nocturnal animals" (Wharton, 2019: 137). Through a most cézannesque *chiaroscuro*, Wharton sketches and disfigures the faces of the Mountain's inhabitants through a highly dehumanizing simile ("like the heads of nocturnal animals") that eventually, by her

use of preterit, provokes a "suspension of the text, a freeze-frame, as in a still life" (Louvel, 1998: 112, my translation). Charity remembers her mother's "thin yet swollen [face], with lips parted in a frozen gasp above the broken teeth," her "gaping mouth and stony eyes" (Wharton, 2019: 138-139). The deliberate cut in the text introduced by the various conjunctions mirrors Mary's disfigured face, while the -*ing* form infuses it with dynamism, opening it up to the *voyure*, in sum, forming an image without forms.

Much like Cézanne's *Mary Magdalen*, also called *Sorrow* (see Figure 3)—the very last painting of this article—Charity Royall also appears to fade away: "Through the small square of glass in the opposite wall Charity saw a deep funnel of sky, so black, so remote, so palpitating with frosty stars that her very soul seemed to be sucked into it" (Wharton, 2019: 143). Wharton uses again the verb 'to seem' which she pairs with a passive form to convey the irreversibility of both the moment and the movement. The shift from Charity as the subject at the sentence's outset to Charity as the object at its conclusion symbolizes a subtle transition towards effacement, reminiscent of the blurred portrayal of Mary Magdalen in *Sorrow*. Equally significant is the deliberate triple iteration of the word "so" three times which mirrors *so*-bs, the three tears streaming down the upper part of Cézanne's painting. Through an aesthetic-semantic process the letter 'o' encapsulates the very form of the tear. Thus, Wharton manages to immerse readers in the tear-filled gaze of her protagonist.

Figure 7 Cézanne, P. (1868-1869) *Sorrow* (or *Mary Magdalen*). Wikimedia Commons [public domain].

Charity's sorrow is also mirrored by her attire, which unmistakably evokes Cézanne's Mary Magdalene:

The grim hours of the night dragged themselves slowly by, and at last the sky paled and dawn threw a cold blue beam into the room. She lay in her corner staring at the

dirty floor, the clothes-line hung with decaying rags, the old woman huddled against the cold stove, and the light gradually spreading across the wintry world […] A mortal lassitude weighed on her. (Wharton, 2019: 144)

Wharton further adds textual depth by sprinkling her prose with highly icy hues, akin to Cézanne's technique: the blue tones ("cold blue beam in the room") and the dirt on the floor reflect all the coldness of Cézanne's painting. The inclusion of art related verbs like "dragged," "paled," and "threw" serve to animate the text—to give a visual *impression*—infusing sadness with energy and artistry. By using *duration*—in the Bergsonian sense—adverbs such as "slowly," "at last," and "gradually," along with introducing light through an -ing form ('spreading'), Wharton parallels Cézanne's *couillard* brushstrokes which distort his paintings' space-time framework. Furthermore, the weight of weariness, or the "mortal lassitude"—symbolized by the deformed skull in Cézanne's painting—becomes the agent of Wharton's last sentence, de-subjectifying Charity and thus reinstates all its supremacy to the *impression*, the impression of *sadness*.

All things considered, the *figural* quality of Wharton's text—the "evocation of language" (Jenny, 1987: 22, my translation)—encourages reader-spectators to see and to hear the text, no longer merely reading it, thereby immersing them in a "pictorial third" (Louvel, 2010: 9, my translation). While she had acknowledged in her introduction to *Ethan Frome* the challenge of portraying the people of Massachusetts she described as being inert as stones, Wharton imparts a "thickness" (Lyotard 1971: 288, my translation) to her linguistic signs, she *trans*-forms her text into a painting akin to that of Cézanne's, ultimately creating an impressionistic iconotext. Thus, in *Summer*, Wharton "paints and draws with and within words" (Lyotard, 1971: 53, my translation), prompting her readers to wonder: "Is reading not sometimes, through writing, almost seeing?" (Dufrenne, 1975: 51).

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THE DOCTOR RECEIVES A MAKEOVER:
A LISA FRANKENSTEIN ANALYSIS

Abstract

The feminine and the macabre have always been deeply intertwined, yet women as main characters in the horror genre are a niche that has just started to be adequately explored. Despite its underlying feminist themes, most cinematic depictions of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) neglect their feminine characters, portraying them as either victims or mere vessels. The aim of this paper is to analyse the evolution of the role women serve in the narratives of various Frankenstein-inspired films as well as explore the importance of a teenaged, gender-bent doctor Frankenstein in the newest rendition of the classic. This study will focus on *Frankenstein* (1910), *Frankenstein* (1931), *Frankenstein Created Woman* (1967) and, especially, *Lisa Frankenstein* (2024).

Introduction

More than a hundred years after its publication, critics around the world are still discovering, layer after layer, new meanings in one of the arguably most famous Gothic novels of the nineteenth century. Mary Shelley's story has been generally agreed to be a tale of the modern man torn between novelty (science) and tradition (God), the predecessor of what today is the science-fiction genre and an allegory of alienation as a result of rampant lookism, yet, more often than not, the biographical details in the novel are overlooked in order to support more general claims. What happens then is the loss of one of the core meanings of the text, as Moers (1976: 92) theorizes, that Dr. Frankenstein's scientific endeavours are a grotesque and painfully honest metaphor for pregnancy, childbirth and post-partum depression.

Riddled with unsuccessful pregnancies and death, Mary Shelly's youth and origin greatly impacted her writing and especially what was to become one of the most influential pieces of Gothic literature. *Frankenstein* (1818) managed to shine light into the obscurity of the relationship between women and reproduction in an era when the experience of being a woman was meant to be something deeply internalised and inherently taboo. In her dissertation, Blázquez Cruz (2021: 6-12) writes in detail about what kind of society Shelley's book was born into: from expecting mothers not knowing how to handle pregnancy and delivery: "About a month before the baby was born I remember asking my aunt where the baby would come from" (qtd. in Blázquez Cruz, 2021:10) to men ensuring that both female sexuality and reproduction were greatly mysticised and stigmatized on all societal levels.

At its core, *Frankenstein* (1818) is a story imbued with feminist ideology. It is, firstly, a reimagined birth myth with the ultimate goal of acknowledging the horrors of motherhood in a time when human reproduction was nothing more than an instinctual act and a social milestone. Women were expected to innately have child-rearing and homemaking skills, otherwise they would be publicly shamed. By making a man attempt organic creation through inorganic means, Shelley highlights the distance between mother and newborn as well as the burden of needing to be unconditionally loving to your creation in order to prevent its degradation. The rampage the creature goes on in the original story is the tangible repercussion of "Frankenstein's inadequacy as a mother and the insufficiency of masculinity" (Rahner, 2018).

Secondly, it showcases various feminine characters that play vital roles in the main story of the overachieving Viktor Frankenstein. Women like Elizabeth, Safie, Margaret and Justine are more than sisters, mothers and wives. They fight for love and family, have principles and free drive, are educated, complex, and contribute to a rich story that wouldn't be able to organically progress without either their mere presence, call to action or own involvement into the main plot.

Frankenstein (1910)

The very first movie inspired by the novel, *Frankenstein* (1910) was a severely shortened and underdeveloped version of the story. Around 13 minutes long, black and white, and mute, the film does not have the sufficient resources to accurately depict all the events that took place throughout the chapters of the book. Thus, there are characters missing entirely, chronological changes and artistic choices that almost turn Shelley's story in something totally new.

One of the very few characters present in this specific adaptation is a young, feminine one that, by using context clues, viewers can assume is Elizabeth, Viktor's cousin and love interest. In the small amount of text shots offered between the sequences of the movie, there is minimal information provided about said character, namely that she is about to get married to the protagonist and that she is affectionately nicknamed "The Sweetheart". Even though she is meant to represent one of the pillars of who Viktor is and becomes by the end of the story, the feminine love interest in the film is almost comically plain and static, nameless and utterly useless to the main narrative. She doesn't pivot the plot further or pushes it back in any manner, her presence so lacklustre that she could be fully removed from the rendition, and it wouldn't affect it in any meaningful way. Hence, ''The Sweetheart'' is nothing more than a prize to be won, Viktor's lottery ticket to a normal, acceptable life in his childhood community.

Frankenstein (1931)

Pop culture has never been the same after James Whale produced his own take on the classic, *Frankenstein*, premiering in 1931 and changing the perception on Mary Shelley's novel forever. The most iconic traits of both the monster and the doctor are the prominent mark this film has left on the collective consciousness. The creature's bolted neck, Henry Frankenstein's iconic line – "It's alive!" (Whale) and lightning as the very source of life instead of vague alchemic experiments create what is known in the modern cultural context as the original story. Upon hearing the title Frankenstein, the average person imagines a green, grotesque creature with a mad scientist for a father, murderous instincts and kooky special effects instead of what the description or plot is in the actual source material; that is the depth of the impact this specific film had both on cinematic history as well as popular culture. What sets this rendition apart from previous ones is that it employs more feminine characters than its predecessors, inching closer to the full feminist potential of the book. Out of those characters, two are worth mentioning and analysing in detail.

On one hand, we have another interpretation on Shelley's Elizabeth, still underdeveloped and borderline stereotypical, yet more involved than Dawley's "Sweetheart". She is, just as in the novel, Frankenstein's love interest and cousin, serving as one of the main plot drivers in the movie: she is perpetually worried about her fiancé's well-being and is more than eager to get married and start her domestic life alongside Henry who is way too busy with his experiments to respect the supposed timeline of their marital journey. Either care giver or erotic object, Elizabeth has virtually no thoughts and desires of her own and is nothing more than a device to show the atrocities Frankenstein's creature is able to commit: the division of a family and assault on the weaker, frail female form.

In one of the more static scenes, Elizabeth is spending time in the garden with her husband, obediently resting her head on his lap while he leisurely smokes. The image of feminine submission is completed by the blonde lighting another cigarette for Frankenstein, metaphorically keeping alive the flame of passion in their dysfunctional marriage. She makes sure he is properly taken care of while receiving little to no gratitude, going as far as accepting her secondary role in the relationship.

Later in the movie, as their wedding approaches and the creature gets progressively more aggressive, Elizabeth becomes the embodiment of Cassandra's myth, doomed to be doubted by her husband in spite of her continuous warnings. Deemed hysterical, she is locked inside her room where the monster presumably assaults her, ending up a victim of the horrific result of her own lover's experiment. As the camera, along with Frankenstein and other various worried guests, pans to the bed where Elizabeth is, we can notice a languid body and an angelic face, conveniently sprawled on the bed in an ironically similar manner to the figure depicted in one of the paintings Shelley's mother herself posed for. Eroticised in her

pain, Elizabeth's glamorous deflowering is the starting point for Frankenstein's journey to redemption.

On another hand we have Maria, not a part of the original roster of feminine characters, having been created especially for this movie. She is a young peasant girl who's only role is to teach the monster about humanity in several ways: either by showing empathy and openness despite the creature's quite unpleasant looks or being a victim in the same way Elizabeth is. The monster, watching flowers floating on the nearby body of water, picks up the girl and throws her in without knowing she wouldn't be able to come back. Consequently, the monster must trade knowledge for hands smeared with the blood of the innocent.

Frankenstein Created Woman (1967)

More than three decades after the release of the cult classic *Frankenstein*, Keys adds its own spin on the classic story by making a drastic and impressively bold change: the creature itself is no longer male, but a woman's body is used to house a man's soul and, thus, a new genre of monster is born. The only relevant feminine character in the entirety of the film, Christina's bodily transformation is just as stark as her mental one.

The mere daughter of a landlord turns from disabled and disfigured to disturbingly attractive, from shy and demure to cunning and charming, the vengeful spirit of her dead lover aiding in her metamorphosis from an ingénue to femme fatale. Though apparently feminist, gender-swapping the monster does not have the desired effect and the attempt at reimagining the creature by offering it a subversive edge falls short. Christina is nothing more than a vessel, a living, breathing tomb for Hans's bloodthirsty spirit who aspired to get revenge by employing seduction tactics. Christina's whole being becomes a weapon and an embodiment of revenge while her needs and wants are seldom even represented. The viewer may be under the impression that the murderous rampage she goes on to eliminate all of the men that participated in the framing of her lover is her attempt at independence and owning her sexuality, but in the ending scene it can clearly be observed that once Christina realised what "she" had done, she is overcome with guilt and disgust, resulting in her taking her own life.

The apparent progressiveness of the film resides solely on the fact that, compared to past renditions, one of the main characters is a woman who has the power to fight back against perpetrators and bring forth retribution, yet she is consistently either mocked or objectified, used in the truest sense of the word in order to fulfil the needs of the other masculine characters in the story: she is entertainment for the bachelors that regularly visit her father's tavern, she is the only woman that would take on the role of lover for Hans who is systematically discriminated in their small community, she is the only body available for Frankenstein and Dr. Hertz to

perform their experiments on; she is stripped of her autonomy and free will in order to propel the plot forward in true patriarchal fashion.

Lisa Frankenstein **(2024)**

Released in February 2024, *Lisa Frankenstein* enlarges the fictional universe first introduced in the cult classic *Jennifer's Body*, intertwining Gothic literature and 80' pop culture to create a campy, coming-of-age dark comedy. The film explores themes of grief, accountability, and self-perception in a deceptively bright and funny manner, simultaneously macabre and nauseatingly technicolour. Its protagonist, modelled after Shelley's Viktor Frankenstein is a motherless teenage girl (Lisa Swallows) that has quirky interests and mediocre social skills, who, while attempting to navigate high school cliques and romance, brings a Victorian man back to life. In this case, the woman is neither invisible, a care giver, an erotic object nor a monster, she is the doctor himself, tinkering with the very essence of life.

Biologically speaking, by being a woman, Lisa is bestowed with everything necessary to create life, but she actively chooses an alternative route to achieve her own goals. The artificial creature she enhances through stereotypically feminine tools is the solution to most problems the teenager encounters, the creature becoming progressively more involved in Lisa's life, both from a familial and romantic perspective.

Of great relevance are the means the protagonist uses to augment the monster's characteristics. On one hand, she uses her sister's tanning bed on the highest setting to shock life in the walking corpse she encounters one night. Electricity as what enables the body to move and act is a clear nod to *Frankenstein* (1931) with a modern and girly twist. On the other hand, more often than not, throughout the movie we can spot Lisa stitching up new body parts as to fill up any incapabilities the creature may have left the tomb with. A stereotypical activity of women in the Victorian era, sewing is used here to oppose science as the means of replicating life. By using a rather traditional approach to bettering her undead boyfriend, Lisa pays homage to femininity and its importance in creation, artistic and cultural as well as biological.

Chronologically, Lisa adds various characteristics to the existing corpse with the ultimate goal of collaging a perfect boyfriend: he firstly receives an ear as to be able to play the piano and listen to the teenager's never-ending venting, then he receives a hand to further serve Lisa and hold her hand throughout all the unhinged events that swiftly take place in the film, and lastly, she attaches her initial crush's penis to the creature so he could have intercourse with her.

Reclaiming the body and sexuality is one of the core themes of the movie and Lisa having complete control over the monster's body allows her to have complete control over her own. The film begins with a scene of sexual assault that greatly impacts the teen and her relationship with intimacy, so all the modifications she

inflicts on the creature serve as an opportunity for her to exercise autonomy and ownership, first of the creature, then, of herself. In true teenage fashion, she is comically self-centred, trait that through pure ''human'' affection turns into confidence and vulnerability.

A raw, neon-coloured monography of teenage angst, the daily life of this secluded, intellectual teen is nothing more than a more light-hearted retelling of Viktor's struggles in the original. Lisa's internal monologue is just as borderline obsessive as Frankenstein's and her detachment from the creature she not only imbues with life but betters through their continuous murders is eerily similar to Viktor's resentment for the monster. The warped relationship between creator and creation is approached in a modernised way, showcasing the shift in priorities: from principles and the self in the initial novel to mutual love and freedom in *Lisa Frankenstein*.

Having the "improper mother" as a woman in this specific retelling brings it way closer to the classic novel compared to other renditions up until now. Lisa is a direct projection of Shelly's feelings about motherhood as they are depicted in *Frankenstein*, the reluctancy, selfishness, fear and isolation as perceived by Williams' protagonist mimic in detail what Mary Shelly tried to convey about womanhood by writing a story about a man engaging in creation.

Conclusions

From the very first Frankenstein-inspired movie to the latest one that has graced the cinemas, women have always taken part in the existence of Viktor's story. Societal changes have prompted directors and screenwriters to bravely attempt challenging what would be acceptable as a rendition of the classic, shifting the initial masculine focus of this fundamentally feminine tale towards a more accurate and complete woman-centred narrative.

Diachronically speaking, the woman turns from insignificant to bystander, monster and ultimately main character (the scientist), underlining how aligning the representation of a story with its core theme and values makes it gradually more appealing to the audiences as well as historically relevant. Girls today needed a quirky Lisa Swallows the same way Mary Shelly needed an embodiment of her fears about motherhood in Viktor Frankenstein's person.

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KEN KESEY'S *ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST*
A PORTRAYAL OF AMERICAN SOCIETY

Abstract

Psychedelic substances have always been known as a key factor for social degradation. Its impact is known to be the most severe and occurrent specifically in periods of crisis, when a society struggles due to economic, political or cultural factors. This article tends to showcase how the increasing scale of drug abuse, in post-war United States of America directly influenced Ken Kesey, one of the most notorious beatniks, to write the novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. This book tackles the most important social divergencies of the time, such as drug abuse, mal praxis of mentally ill people and the usage of psychiatric institutions as a tool for repression. The method I used consists in a comparative analysis between the mental asylum from the novel, and the real-life animosities of the 1960's U.S. society.

Introduction: Psychedelic Substances and Beat Generation

United States of America, just like many other countries from all over the world, suffered some radical changes after the second World War in a pretty short period of time. The prolific spread of capitalism, and the establishment of an intrinsically materialistic system leads to some drastic consequences, such as poverty and a huge dissonance between social classes. The inability to adapt to a new socio-political order provoked among Americans an acute feeling of dismay, loneliness and disorientation. Henceforth, on this pretty harsh social background appears the issue of substance abuse, which quickly becomes some sort of a remedy for those who were struggling. New drugs, such as mescaline and LSD, enter the narcotic market and become an inherent aspect of the American society.

The Beat Generation was enormously influenced by the place that narcotics occupied in the U.S society at that point. Supposedly, the name of this literary movement was firstly used by Jack Kerouac, one of the most influential beatniks. One of this term's potential connotations is "the 'beaten' condition of the outsider [...] those who look at normal, `square` society from the periphery and reject its discipline and codes" (Gray, 2015: 323), which fits best for *Ken Kesey*'s socio-political orientations. As he was one of the most important Beat Generation writers, his literary activity showcased the major changes inflicted upon the American society by the wave of narcotic addiction. He volunteered in CIA's *MKUltra Project*, where hallucinogenic drugs, such as mescaline and LSD, or new psychiatric treatment methods, such as the Electro Shock Therapy, were tested on people. This fact alone, besides his famous LSD trip with Merry Pranksters, emphasizes the idea that Kesey

was a strong link between Hippie Culture and Beat Generation. The novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* has become his most successful piece of writing, mainly because it tackles the greatest social issues of post-war USA, specifically the mal praxis of mentally ill people, drug abuse and the usage of psychiatric institutions as a tool of repression. Therefore, I believe that the mental asylum from the novel serves as a great metaphor for the American society in the post-war period.

Oregon State Hospital – A Portrayal of The American Society

The mental asylum from the novel shares a hierarchy model, similar to that of the post-war USA society. From my point of view, the patients symbolized low/middle class people, ruled by an authoritarian system, under the conventions of the so-called democratic principles. The patients were either mentally-ill or physically-disabled, both categories being, alas, unable to fit in the society. Therefore, their hospitalization was somehow justified by the government's intention to provide help, regardless of a harsh mistreatment. The mal praxis of mentally ill people in this novel relates to the fact that they were forced to take drugs, without even having the right to question either the type of drug, or the effect they provided upon their psyche. In case of a 'rebellious' attitude, which basically consisted of questioning what type of drugs they're taking, the patients were either harshly abused by the Black Boys, or in the worst-case scenario - they were sent to Disturbed, the core of the hospital, where the EST or lobotomy were performed on them.

As it was mentioned above, then comes the oppressive force, that starts to constraint and dominate the folk: the Black Boys. Their figure emphasized the prompt obedience of people subordinated to someone with a higher social rank. It is due to the fact that the Black Boys were the only ones from the hospital staff that were used as a brute force, when it came to torturing, beating or even raping the patients. Thus, one may easily notice a slight reference to slavery as well, for it's hard to call it a coincidence, when the only coloured character is the one exerting tough physical labour. At the same time, it's interesting that the small-rank nurses are pretty much on the same layer with the Black Boys, due to the fact that their actions are strictly limited to Big Nurse's commands. They may also be easily compared to some bland, obedient and pretty vapid middle-class people, subordinated to a more authoritative force. The only thing that proves their superiority in front of the patients are the needles and pills, that are the symbols of this grain of power they possess. Still, unlike the Black Boys, the small-rank nurses are somewhat scared and easily intimidated by the patients. Henceforth, the level of authority they exhibit, compared to the Black Boys, is much less influential. Still, I think they share the same social layer as the Black Boys, due to their prompt obedience to the person who ruled the hospital.

Finally, the Big Nurse portrays a cruel political leader, that still succumbed to a bigger entity, or rather a whole dogma - the Combine. She was exerting her power

by sending the more rebellious patients either to EST or lobotomy, as some sort of a precaution against the potential destabilization of the asylum's state of affairs. By saying "the more rebellious patients," I meant the ones who were more lucid, and who weren't that easily subordinated to the hospital staff. All of her decisions and actions were ruled by the assumption that she's serving and helping the Combine to prosper. Thus, a similar process might be identified in every single totalitarian regime: simple folk, that threaten an intrinsically corrupt system through their strive to freedom, are inevitably persecuted. That's pretty much what happens in the novel: special needs people are the guinea pigs, upon whom, during some experiments, are inflicted drugs like mescaline or LSD, let alone the experiments with the ECT. If they try to rebel, because of their severely aggravated health, they are immediately oppressed.

The system of government, by which the whole hospital operates, that also portrays the socio-political animosities of the 1960's USA, might easily be compared to the concept of illiberal democracy. The patients had the right to take votes regarding particular matters of their 'hospital life,' with the classic approach that the side with the majority of votes wins. On the other hand, still, the patients from the asylum were strictly watched and punished for the smallest inconveniences. It's a sort of simulacrum, as from one side everything looks pretty liberal and egalitarian, despite the fact that it was all weighted down by the omnipresence of the Big Nurse, and the physical torture inflicted by the Black Boys. Just like it happens nowadays: technically you have the right to vote, but you don't really have what to vote for. And if the people obtain what they've been fighting for – the authorities do everything to restore the power. One fights in vain, as at the end of the day, the whole society succumbs to the ruling political regime, which always remains at the top:

> She's too big to be beaten. She covers one whole side of the room like a Jap statue. There's no moving her and no help against her. She's lost a little battle here today, but it's a minor battle in a big war that she's been winning and that she'll go on winning. […] She'll go on winning, just like the Combine, because she has all the power of the Combine behind her. She don't lose on her losses, but she wins on ours. To beat her you don't have to whip her two out of three or three out of five, but every time you meet. As soon as you let down your guard, as soon as you lose once, she's won for good. And eventually we all got to lose. Nobody can help that. (Kesey, 2005: 100)

I think this Kafkaesque motive of an overwhelming sense of despair only enhances the dystopic valence of the text. As the author suggests, this practice of oppressing the patients is similar to the way the U.S. authorities used to brush the trash underneath the carpet, rather than facing particular issues with the intention of actually solving them. Ken Kesey fit the best for the role of the one criticizing the American society from this point of view, given that he worked at the Menlo Park Veterans' Hospital, volunteering in the MKUltra Project. According to *The Electric*

Kool-Aid Acid Test by Tom Wolfe (1989: 48-49), the atrocities that take place in the Oregon State Hospital were indeed witnessed by Ken Kesey in real life:

> But Kesey got absorbed in the life on the psychiatric ward. […] Sometimes he would go to work high on acid. He could see into their faces. Sometimes he wrote, and sometimes he drew the pictures of the patients […] Eating Laredo buds – he would write like mad under the drugs. After he came out of it, he could see that a lot of it was junk. But certain passages – like Chief Broom in his schizophrenic fogs – it was true vision, a little of what you could see if you opened the doors of perception, friends...

The so-called fog from the text, brought up previously, is the most important symbol in the whole novel. It's mentioned from the very first pages, when the protagonist Chief Broom was still obedient to the Big Nurse and the whole hospital staff, long before his character development and friendship with McMurphy. "Right now, she's got the fog machine switched on, and it's rollin' in so fast I can't see a thing but her face, rolling in thicker and thicker, and I feel as hopeless and dead as I felt happy a minute ago, when she gave that little jerk – even more hopeless than ever before, on account of I know now there is no real help against her or her Combine. McMurphy can't help any more than I could. Nobody can help. And the more I think about how nothing can be helped, the faster the fog rolls in. And I'm glad when it gets thick enough you're lost in it and can let go, and be safe again" (Kesey, 2005: 100).

As the whole novel operates with various symbols and metaphors, thus creating multiple thematic layers – the fog is no exception. At a first glance, it might be perceived literally, as a fog machine that limits the patient's sight in the asylum. It sounds pretty authentic, given that *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* is a novel with lots of dystopic features. Henceforth, this mental asylum could use the fog to limit the patient's perception of time and space, just like *Brave New World*'s characters were forced to take soma in order to stagnate physically and mentally. However, I think that the Fog serves rather as a metaphor, that crystallises the idea of indifference, and Chief's preference to succumb to the hospital routine and to ignore the fact that other patients are mistreated, as long as he himself remains safe. "You had a choice: you could either strain and look at things that appeared in front of you in the fog, painful as it might be, or you could relax and lose yourself" (Kesey, 2005: 113)

On the other hand, as this novel was inspired by Kesey's volunteering in drug experiments, the fog may also symbolize the effect of narcotics upon human mind. Chief was hospitalized with schizophrenia, and as any other patient, he was taking the pills that the Combine forced him to take. Thus, the fog becomes some sort of a liminal space, between lucidity and drug haze, where Chief's ego roams throughout the novel, until the point when the fog finally fades away. This particular thing occurs when the protagonist, though at first reluctant, timid and taciturn (as he was, supposedly, deaf) starts to break through and consider his actions as being

potentially useful for the other patients from the ward. He looks down on the Big Nurse, he becomes more aware of his physical force, he takes interest in the fight for the patient's rights. The latter point was best expressed in the fragment, were the patients voted for the installation of a TV set, so that they could watch football. Chief's vote, which was the decisive one, expresses clearly that he finally picked a side, thus breaking the ice and pulling his head on the surface, above the layer of nonchalance to which he previously succumbed.

From this key event on, the fog finally diminishes and doesn't appear any more. Just after the TV was finally set, and they all watched a football match for the first time on the ward, the protagonist says "There's no more fog any place" (Kesey, 2005: 129). It took him only to start fighting for his rights, as the fog instantly disappeared.

Conclusions

In the end, it's undeniable that *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* emphasizes a set of social patterns, that might easily be identified in a political regime, similar to that of the United States of America after World War II, when a new socio-political structure started to emerge upon the layer of crisis and poverty.

Alongside William Burroughs, Allan Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac and other beatniks, Ken Kesey accepts the role of an outcast and emerges fully into it. The hippie lifestyle that he promoted, namely expressed by drug abuse and his endless roaming throughout America, clearly indicates that he had a special perspective of the country he lived in his whole life.

The influence his literary technique of writing under the influence of psychedelic substances had upon American literature is incontestable, for he managed to expose an inherently corrupt and unjust system in a way that the actual U.S. authorities of the time did not accept, hence the multiple bans and strict censorship that the novel underwent. Still, it only proves that by writing *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, the famous beatnik managed to expose the greatest animosities of the 1960's U.S.A society, thus creating an authentic portrayal of post-war America, which justifies the recognition Ken Kesey gained in world literature.

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EXPLORING TIKTOK IMPACT ON YOUTH DISCOURSE

Abstract

The present paper looks at a popular phenomenon in youth discourse: due to the long exposure of social media, young people seem to pick up trends and use them in conversation. This analysis investigates one possible account as to why this happens and offers a preview of communication in the cognitive manner, using Deirdre Wilson and Dan Sperber's Relevance Theory as the main theoretical framework. The hypothesis of the current paper is that young users of TikTok create utterances referring to sounds trending on the platform in order to observe Relevance Theory. This paper aims to account for this linguistic phenomenon, analysing several authentic examples.

Introduction

One interesting aspect to consider when it comes to social media is its impact on language. There is a tendency nowadays to produce utterances by 'citing' TikTok sounds or texts in offline discourse. It is important to note that this phenomenon can be seen in the younger population. The schema behind it is the following: young people spend a large amount of time on social media platforms, implicitly TikTok. On this platform specifically, the linguistic input is presented in an easy, rapid and repetitive form, so that one video sound would, for example, 'show up' on a user's feed several times. This is what brings popularity to the sound. Additionally, due to the sharing tool on the platform, which allows users to send TikToks to each other, sounds, texts and ideas become viral. That is how they reach a large number of users and they will enjoy popularity in a short period of time.

What is important for this topic is what happens after a TikTok sound becomes viral, namely it enters discourse: young people use TikTok sounds to create utterances in a dialogue with other young people who also use TikTok. Therefore I think it can be said that this belongs to youth slang. The aim of this paper is to account for this linguistic phenomenon and for that I will go through Deirdre Wilson and Dan Sperber's Relevance Theory. My hypothesis is that young users of TikTok create utterances referring to sounds trending on the platform in order to observe Relevance Theory.

Theoretical framework

Wilson and Sperber's Relevance Theory puts forward the concept of relevance as a cognitive category, highlighting that any utterance is considered relevant if it yields positive cognitive effects. One important cognitive effect is contextual implication,

defined as "a conclusion deducible from the input and the context together, but from neither input nor context alone" (2002: 251).

Another relevant aspect of this framework is that the more relevant a linguistic input is for the hearer, the more cognitive effects it produces. Interestingly, the human brain makes a 'selection' of stimuli, so that we automatically activate potentially relevant assumptions and we interpret them in the most productive way in order to maximise their relevance. This tendency is named by the Wilson and Sperber the Cognitive Principle of Relevance (2002).

In addition to this, the hearer performs 'subtasks' in his cognitive mechanism so that he constructs a hypothesis about the speaker's meaning: "a. Follow a path of least effort in computing cognitive effects: Test interpretive hypotheses (disambiguations, reference resolutions, implicatures, etc.) in order of accessibility. b. Stop when your expectations of relevance are satisfied" (Wilson& Sperber, 2002: 259).

What makes it possible for the hearer to construct the meaning is that utterances contain logical forms, i.e. conceptual representations which the speaker provides in the help of the hearer's inferential comprehension process. Therefore, the overall comprehension process contains the following 'subtasks': constructing an appropriate hypothesis about explicit content (i.e. explicatures), about the intended contextual assumptions (i.e. implicated premises) and about the intended contextual implications (i.e. implicated conclusions).

Another theoretical framework that is important for this discussion is the notion of "common ground", introduced by Robert Stalnaker, who believes that the key point of communication is the background information participants share. He highlights the idea of speaker presupposition which is relevant for any conversation: "one presupposes that φ only if one presupposes that others presuppose it as well" (2002:1). In other words, a speaker will presuppose that the other participants have the same background knowledge as him/her and will provide input that aligns with their *common ground.*

Additionally, this type of speech can be characterized as "talk as play" (Jennifer Coates's term) which is based on Bateson's (1953) idea of play frame. According to Coates, conversations count as *serious* or *play* and speakers signal their intentions through humor, for instance: "Humour often lies in the gap between what is said and what is meant. When a play frame is invoked, we have the choice of joining in the play and responding to what is said, or of reverting to the serious mode" (Coates, 2007: 31). She continues by describing the linguistic and para-linguistic features of talk in a play frame, such as: overlapping speech, co-constructed utterances, repetition, laughter and metaphor. This paper will show that these features can be seen as characterizing TikTok utterances, therefore placing them in this category.

The data

The data collected for this study is drawn from private messages and from spontaneous overheard speech and that is because this phenomenon happens naturally in day-to-day youth slang (authentic examples). The examples I have collected come mainly from teenagers and young adults, and the mean age of participants is 20.

I have gathered 29 examples of utterances with TikTok sounds references: 15 were taken from private written messages, 13 were overheard spontaneous data and 1 was taken from a TikTok video.

These examples prove that the TikTok references speakers make are interpreted positively by the hearers, because they create irony and humor and often times the hearers also contribute to the reference, by continuing the cited sounds.

Method

The idea of the current study is that this phenomenon in slang can be explained through Relevance Theory. When this kind of utterance is produced, it yields a positive cognitive effect in the hearer's mind, because both the speaker and the hearer connect it with that same trend on TikTok. The verification for this is that the result consists in irony and humour.

The hearer's mind follows the same subtasks Wilson and Sperber talk about: following a path of least effort (the TikTok reference is what the hearer first thinks about provided that he has seen the trend) then disambiguates (thinking about why it is relevant to him, namely what is the message of this sound on TikTok) and then connects the sound message with the conversation between the participants (stopping when the expectations are fulfilled).

> (1) "A: Ai văzut teoria cum că Nemo de fapt nu există și tatăl lui e schizofrenic și și-a imaginat totul?
> B: Nu cred. Nemo is alive.
> A: *Denial is a river in Egypt*."
> ["Have you seen that theory according to which Nemo does not exist and his father is actually schizophrenic and he imagined the whole thing?"
> "I don't believe it. Nemo is alive"
> "*Denial is a river in Egypt*."]

Looking at example (1), the implicature of the cited TikTok sound is that the hearer is reluctant to the news and wants to believe that the animation movie does not have a hidden message. The speaker observes the hearer's attitude and implies that the information is pretty obvious and should be accepted.

It is important to note that both participants should know the reference to the

TikTok sound, otherwise communication fails, as seen in (2):

(2) *"-Bonjour!*
-Les fleurs, florile.
-Ce?
-A, nu știi sound-ul?"
["*-Bonjour!*"
"*Les fleurs, florile.*"
"What?"
"Ah, don't you know that sound?"]

The speaker intended to simply greet the other person, but the interlocutor believed his French salute as a 'cue' for the TikTok sound and attempted to meet his expectations by continuing the sound. However, they did not have the same reference and instead of humor, confusion arose.

The reason for this is that this kind of utterances are often triggered by word or a phrase, which makes the hearer think about that particular sound and contribute to the conversation, as seen in example (3):

(3) "*-Sunt frumușică?*
-Țiplă!
-Țiplă?"
["Am I pretty?"
"Stunning!"
"Stunning?"]

The cited sound featured someone in an interview asking the interviewer whether they looked good for the camera, and the interviewer wanted to accentuate that they looked exceptionally well, thus using the Romanian expression "țiplă". After this sound became viral, several people started using it when asking someone "how do I look?" and the interlocutor would pay them a compliment by mimicking the TikTok sound.

Similarly, Helga Kotthoff highlights in her study about irony that "conversational inferencing is an ongoing process which works with assumptions that are continually readjusted" (2003: 1408). On this note, the continuation of a specific sound may be interpreted as a 'readjustment' of inferences, as Kotthoff notes: "ironic activities are always interpreted in connection with the ongoing conversation; among close friends, they tend to be understood in a playful frame, to be expanded through mutual responses" (2003: 1408). However, this account would place this type of utterances in the domain of irony. While humor is most likely intended, it is not clear whether speakers use these TikTok references starting from irony. More research is needed on this view.

Nonetheless, TikTok utterances can be interpreted through Stalnaker's concept of *common ground* as a key concept in conversations. Communication is

driven by this background information that participants share, which can be seen in (4):

> (4) "-În seara asta se bea!
> - Frumooos! Aperol?
> - Nu. *Negroni spagliato.*
> - *Ooo, with prosecco in it.*"
> ["We are drinking tonight!"
> "Nice! Aperol?"
> "No. *Negroni spagliato.*"
> "*Ooo, with prosecco in it.*"]

(4) is an example of TikTok-related utterance where the common ground is that both interlocutors have heard the sound on TikTok and reproduced it by continuing the message.

My prediction is that in type of communication, speakers use TikTok sounds messages in order to observe Relevance and because of the common ground, the implicature that can be derived from the utterance is connected to the original trend on the platform as part of the least processing effort on the hearer's part.

Results and Discussion

Looking at examples provided, it can be observed that TikTok-based utterances do follow Relevance as a cognitive concept in communication. What speakers do is that they make a reference to a popular trend on social media and use it to create humor and to create an indirect speech act by adding a certain implicature. Looking at example (5), the indirect speech act produced by the speaker is an expressive because he/ she is shocked by the realization that the hearer is turning 25:

> (5) „-Câți ani a făcut? 26? Dacă eu fac 25 și ea e cu un an mai mare...
> - Tu faci 25??
> - Da.
> - *Oh my god, you're like 30!*"
> ["How old is she? 26? If I am turning 25 and she is one year older than me…"
> "You are turning 25??"
> "Yes."
> "*Oh my god, you're like 30!*"]

The implicature of this utterance is: "You are getting old and I am shocked". This implicature is derived mainly from the TikTok sound where two sisters were having a similar conversation and the younger sister wanted to make fun of the age her sister is turning, by suggesting that she is older and thus, exaggerating to what seems an "old" age.

My data proves that generally young people create this type of utterances, therefore this phenomenon can be attributed to slang. Another observation that can be made by looking at the examples, is that young people also "mix" languages, in this case Romanian and English, which can also be attributed to slang. That is also because of social media exposure, which allows people to hear a big amount of English input.

Another point that I would like to make is that often times a response containing the TikTok reference violates the Gricean Maxims, but somehow the right implicature is still derived, which may account for why relevance should be seen as a cognitive concept rather than a discourse one and also strengthens the argument as to why pragmatics is in the mind -the mentalist approach (see Sinclair, 1995). This can be seen in example (6).

(6) „- Te-ai descurcat?
- A fost greu. *Greutățile vieții în viață m-au făcut să car mai mult decât a trebuit să duc.*"
["So did you manage?"
"It was hard. *The life struggles in this life have made me endure much more than I had to carry.*"]

In this example, the interlocutor gives no simple or direct answer to the question, thus violating the Quantity and Relation principle in the Gricean framework, but still communication is felicitous because both participants understood the reference and derived the answer from there. It is important to note that all this happens in the brains of the participants, i.e. the subtasks they had to perform, and not in the actual sentence.

This study analyzed a phenomenon in youth slang, namely using TikTok sounds in discourse. My hypothesis is that this type of communication happens cognitively, according to the Relevance Theory, that is to say participants (more specifically young people) contribute to the meaning of a sentence by referring to viral trends on the social media platform in conversations with other young people.

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FINDING HUMANITY IN THE NON-HUMAN WORLD

Abstract
Having grown used to the fast evolution of technology in an artificial utopia created by capitalist society, many people distance themselves from nature or find themselves unable to meaningfully connect with it. Instead, we tend to commodify nature's abnormal presentations rather than acknowledging the effects of our actions on the planet. Laura Gilpin and Mary Oliver use poetry to show death and abnormality in animals and how the way humans choose to interact with the non-human world changes its fate. In this paper, I will analyse "The Kitten" and "Two-Headed Calf" to show how eco-poets use language to bring us closer to nature, but also how we are losing our humanity.

In his essay titled "Nature," Emerson had said about him and his contemporaries: "We are as much strangers in nature, as we are aliens from God. We do not understand the notes of birds. The fox and the deer run away from us; the bear and tiger rend us. We do not know the uses of more than a few plants, as corn and the apple, the potato and the vine" (Emerson, 1849: 63). A recent study says that 55% percent of the population lives in urban areas and that the urban population has rapidly grown from 751 million to 4.2 billion in less than 70 years (Ritchie, Samborska & Roser, 2024). Urbanisation and the fast evolution of technology has made modern humans distance themselves from nature and animals, while still exploiting them for their resources and labour. Busy building an artificial utopia on capitalistic ruins, the modern human is no longer interested or able to connect with nature in a meaningful way. He does not know how to interact with the non-human world and is desensitised to their suffering, also caused by man. We have come to think about nature and the non-human inhabitants of the planet as disposable and those who choose to engage with nature and work with it, like farmers, are looked down upon, considered uneducated. But there are ways in which we can get back our humanity, and that is through literature that shows nature as a safe space and helps us reshape our ethics and attitude towards it: "The aesthetic that forms us will profoundly alter the kinds of actions we imagine as possible and desirable" (Bilbro, 2015: 133).

Animals and the Well-Being of Humans

Animals are an essential part in the well-being of humans. In their paper, Thomas Dietz and Richard York look at how animals contribute to the well-being of human and distinguish four types of animal contribution: as key components of all the ecosystems, as companions, as objects, and as labour. Humans depend on ecosystems for survival and the production of well-being and animals heavily influence these

ecosystems, thus influencing processes that regulate climate, water supply, production of soil and much else (2015: 42): "Engagement with species that have co-evolved to interact socially with humans is a major source of well-being for many people."

We see this in the case of domesticated animals, such as dogs and cats, but also in animals used for therapy, such as horses. However, the most frequent use of animals has been for production:

> Still, the evolution of mutualistic interactions between humans and other animals has often been related to production: dogs aid in hunting and in guarding their human group, cats prey on mice and other species that consume human food supplies, horses have been a major source of labour for transportation and agriculture (Dietz and York, 2015: 42).

Additionally, they are treated as objects: "Animals are also treated as natural resources […] In addition, animals, with the ability to produce meat, milk, eggs, fur, wool and other valued materials often play much the same role as some kinds of machines" (Dietz and York, 2015: 43). This could be a good, mutual exchange between animals and humans, "in cultures where hunting provides a substantial portion of food it seems to be common to treat the hunted animals as individuals with agency who deserve respect and even gratitude" (Dietz and York, 2015: 44). But due to the fast food and fast fashion industries, the demand of such materials has drastically increased and has led humans to breed these animals in caged spaces, abuse them and shorten their lifespan.

Dietz and York also point out that animals are used to support labor:

> The fourth role in which animals contribute to human well-being is as workers. Throughout most of human history, animals have had a special role in the production of goods and services, acting as a form of labor that complements the labor of humans. […] non-human animals possess agency and in some cases skills that can contribute to the production process. (2015: 45)

Even though we see animals as workers, they are not able to advocate for themselves when they are abused. Unlike humans, who can resist oppression through organized riots and revolutions, animals only have their physical power to use in a fight, but that still has its limitations and can be tamed. This is when human must step in and protect their fellow inhabitants on Earth.

Animals as Ruins

In this paper I will be talking about a different category of animals that have an essential role in the well-being of human, and that is "animals as ruins." These are the animals that are not able to fulfil any of the roles presented above. There is no

production of physical goods destined for usage by humans, so the role of these animals is overlooked.

These are the animals used for aesthetics by writers and poets, such as Laura Gilpin and Mary Oliver, to show their readers the "freaks" and wonders created by nature. They show their readers the effects our actions have on the planet and make them empathize with, not commodify these creatures. They teach us that nature is a safe place and not something dangerous we can't relate to.

"The Kitten" by Mary Oliver and "The Two-Headed Calf" by Laura Gilpin are two poems that depict abnormal representations in animals. They are similar in both structure and subject, but the way these two poets show who humans interact with the non-human world is completely different, thus changing the fate of those animals.

Who Is Interacting with the Animal?

In "The Two-Headed Calf," the "farm boys" are the ones who discover the body of what they call "a freak of nature" (Gilpin, 1977: 59). They, just like the calf, are innocent. They are the uneducated humans who do not know how to interact with the non-human world, and they act accordingly: they expose the creature to the world, for everyone else to see, to study, to mock.

In "The Kitten", the poetic voice "I, alone" is the one who buries the body of the "perfectly black still born kitten" (Oliver, 2017: 366). Here, the poetic voice represents the educated human, the one who gives back to nature what belongs to it. The poem acts as an ancient ritual. The kitten is an offering given back to nature by man. It is a secluded act.

Both poems mention the museum and the newspaper,: "I suppose I could have given it / to a museum, / I could have called the local/newspaper" (Oliver, 2017: 366); "they will wrap his body in newspaper and carry him to the museum" (Gilpin, 1977: 59). Both the museum and the newspaper are used to capture man's innovations, as well as disasters. The "I" chooses to keep the animal innocent, untouched by man's hands, while the "farm boys" are covering the entire animal with human sins.

In most cultures, black cats are considered bad omens, so most people would choose to not engage with such a creature. Despite this, the poetic voice in "The Kitten" chooses to give the small and helpless creature a proper burial. Its deformity reminds us of a type of powerful creatures in mythology, namely the cyclops. The calf is also called a "freak of nature," a discriminatory term used at freak shows, and is seen as less than its fellow non-humans. The calf's polycephaly also reminds us of powerful mythological creatures.

Nature's Infinite Beauty

Both poems capture a passing moment of nature's infinite yet ephemeral beauty. This is similar to Emerson's claim that: "To the attentive eye, each moment of the year has its own beauty, […] a picture which was never seen before, and which shall never be seen again" (Emerson, 1849: 16). This beauty is unique to the poets, the readers, and the subjects of the poems, as they all view this moment through different eyes, shaped by different experiences and ethics. Oliver and Gilpin show their readers how creative nature truly is, "how life is infinitely inventive" (Oliver, 2017: 366). There are readers who might focus on the abnormal representation of nature, which could have happened due to our own actions on the planet. But the stillborn kitten will only see the kind gesture it receives from the human in its short life. As for the two-headed calf, despite its deformity and short life, it has the privilege no other human or non-human has: to see the night sky with "twice as many stars as usual" (Gilpin, 1977: 59) and die next to its mother.

We see the kitten and the calf throughout their short life. The field serves as their burial or death place, "buried it in a field […] I took it out into the field" (Oliver, 2017: 366), "in the north field" (Gilpin, 1977: 59). This is where the two poems diverge and show two different outcomes, resulted from the interference of humans with the non-human world. The kitten is given a proper burial, so its body can rest and be at peace. The calf, however, has a different fate. It gets a few moments to spend with its mother, but soon its body will be exposed to the world.

Why Eco-Literature Matters

Eco poets use the craft of storytelling to show us the world we don't see and maybe never will. Their craft is a key to deciphering and interacting with the world: "Ecocritics recognize that how we see the world affects how we act in it; our aesthetics shape our ethics" (Bilbro, 2015: 133) as "aesthetics can become a decisive force for or against environmental change" (Buell qtd. in Bilbro, 2015:133).

Storytelling, like many other forms of art, is thought to be useless in a world dictated by profit. Creating and understanding art is a slow process in which we meditate upon ourselves, rethink our morals and rediscover our humanity. Technology evolves at a speed most human cannot keep up with, let alone the planet and the animals who do not even get a chance to adapt to the drastic changes they are forced to experience. Eco-literature plays an important role in showing us that we are part of nature and that even though nature can survive without us, we depend on it. We are exposed to such literature from a young age. Children stories predominantly feature autonomous animal characters, who live simple yet fulfilling lives. However, somewhere along the way between our childhood and old age, we get distracted and overwhelmed by all this advancement that we forget that we must work with nature, not against it:

With large-scale environmental damage, and the desire to inspire responsible changes in human behavior, ecocriticism has made a recent turn toward various modes of the sublime. A sublime aesthetic represents the world as infinitely beyond our human scale. […] Such an aesthetic does not necessarily represent nature as tame and controllable; rather, it portrays humans as responsible members of a pattern that includes them. In other words, it conveys our need for humility without representing the world as so dangerous that we can only relate to it through technological aid (Bilbro, 2015: 133-134).

Nowadays, the average working person does not cultivate a passion for literature, especially "non-essential" literature, nor do they have the time to do that. Eco-poems, like those presented above, are a great way to bring awareness about the impact our action have on the non-human world and make those uninterested in ecology understand why meaningful engagement with the world around them is essential for their own well-being.

Conclusion

Eco-poems, like those written by Mary Oliver and Laura Gilpin, remain important not only for their subject, but also for the way they are presented. Both poets use simple language with an impactful message that can be understood even by those who think poetry is just pretentious language reserved to a privileged community.

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BEYOND THE COLORS OF THE WIND
UNRAVELING STEREOTYPES IN DISNEY'S *POCAHONTAS*

Abstract

Pocahontas is a Disney animated film that has garnered attention for its attempt to portray Native American culture and challenge traditional gender roles. This essay critically examines the film through a Postcolonial and Gender/Queer perspective, to unravel its portrayal of stereotypes and representations. Through a Postcolonial lens, the clash between the English settlers and the Native American Powhatan tribe is analyzed, revealing hidden biases and stereotypes perpetuated in the narrative. The Gender/Queer perspective delves into the representation of gender roles, agency, and relationships in the film, scrutinizing the character of Pocahontas and the dynamics between characters. While the film harbors intentions to challenge stereotypes, it inadvertently reinforces them through repeated use of terms like 'savages' and portrayal of indigenous characters through Eurocentric assumptions. Moreover, the attempts to subvert traditional gender roles often fall short, as Pocahontas ultimately conforms to stereotypical representations of a Disney princess.

Pocahontas is the thirty-third animated movie created by the Walt Disney Company and the first one to be based on a historical character (d'Entremont, 1995: 1302). The action of the film is set in the 17th century and it is focused on the meeting between the English settlers and the Native American Powhatan tribe. Apart from reaching its goal in entertainment for young viewers, *Pocahontas* was expected and proclaimed to become a landmark in America's popular culture. It was a movie that had the potential to shape and change perceptions and attitudes toward the Native American communities. As it was supposed to be based on real characters and historical events, its impact extends beyond the realm of animation movies, as, for many generations of children, it was the movie that introduced the topic of colonialism in the Americas. This analysis aims to examine the movie from a dual perspective, using a Postcolonial lens on one hand and a Queer/Gender lens on the other. By looking at instances that claim to break stereotypes or shed light on various events, this paper will try to establish whether the creators of the film succeed in their endeavor or ended up reinforcing well-established stereotypes in both the Gender/Queer and the Postcolonial paradigms.

As the colonization of the Americas serves as the setting of the movie, a Postcolonial analysis will allow us to analyze how the clash between the two cultures and the impact of the colonization process on the Indigenous community are represented in the narrative. This approach could help uncover hidden biases and

stereotypes present in the film. By applying a Postcolonial lens, the way Native Americans are portrayed, the accuracy of historical events and the ramifications of colonial narratives can be questioned. Also, the manner in which the Native American characters' agency is presented, both from a Postcolonial and from a gender perspective, can be examined.

To continue, a Queer/Gender framework would allow a nuanced examination of the way gender roles, gender stereotypes and relations are represented in the film. The traditional gender roles within the Native American community and the relationship between Pocahontas and John Smith will become the subject of the present research. Also, the analysis of non-normative representation, possible subversions of gender norms and even the presence of hints towards queer characters will be taken into consideration. Overall, an analysis from a Postcolonial and a Gender/Queer perspective of the movie provides a comprehensive and critical examination of *Pocahontas*, allowing for a deeper understanding of its cultural, historical, and social implications. The way in which Native American characteristics and Native American culture are portrayed in *Pocahontas* reveals a complex web of accurate and inaccurate representations. Despite its best efforts, the movie reinforces stereotypes while attempting to highlight the diversity of the Powhatan tribe.

The movie begins with people portrayed as being excited to start the journey towards the New World. However, it seems like they don't really know where they are going or what to expect from this new place, as one of the verses that they repeat is "Or so we have been told/By the Virginia Company" (*Pocahontas* 1995: 2). The same song that opens the movie has a very important line in terms of emphasizing the colonizers' attitude towards this new world and how their a priori knowledge and experience about "new worlds" gives them a false sense of confidence: "I've seen hundreds of New Worlds, Thomas./What could possibly/be different about this one?" (*Pocahontas*, 1995: 5). Ironically, this line was, I believe, intended as a Postcolonial critique of the Eurocentric attitude towards new worlds and peoples. However, the main idea of the film is that we are all human beings and not so different, after all, despite coming from different cultures or continents. Therefore, while actively trying to critique a certain perspective, the movie ends up, at least in this instance, reinforcing the same view it tried to undermine.

In terms of the Native representation, the film follows the formula Ida Yoshinaga described in her paper about *Moana*, a more recent Disney attempt at tackling Native subjects. Yoshinaga argues that "screenwriters jam ethnic content into Act I, to briefly 'culture-splain' the community subtext to Western moviegoers" (2019: 195). In *Pocahontas*, at the very beginning of Act I, the set-up is made up of 5:40, almost 6 minutes of images of the colonizers embarking on the ship, to start their journey towards the New World. As the movie title suggests a focus on the Native Americans, the beginning of the movie points in a completely different direction. In fairness, The Native community has a total of 12 uninterrupted minutes to "culture-

splain" their way of life before the colonizers appear. Also, as the movie is set in a different historical period than the viewers, those initial scenes might be intended to explain the atmosphere of the times and the historical context.

From Said's perspective, this knowledge of new (uncivilized) worlds is what gave the colonizers the power "to have authority over it" and to deny its autonomy (Said, 1979: 32). Further on in the movie, the Governor refers to the potential gold that could be found on the land inhabited by the Native Americans as "They've got **our** (my emphasis) gold, and they'll do anything to keep it!" (*Pocahontas*, 1995: 29). As it later turns out, the Natives didn't even know about or have the much-desired gold, but that is beyond the point. Their agency is completely suspended, not even their hypothetical possessions are safe from the colonizer's greed. And the sole reason for this attitude on the colonizer's part is the fact that they have more knowledge (therefore more power) than the "savages."

In terms of the word "savages," it is mentioned at least 36 times in the movie, with other attributes like "heathen," "devils" or "demons" thrown in, for flavor. It is true that "savages" is used by both the colonizers and the Native Americans to describe each other. However, most of the time it is aimed at the Native Americans. It is true that the producers' intent could have been to show young children how inhumane the appellative sounds when addressed to another human being. However, its repetitions in connection to the Native Americans and its repeated usage in a catchy song, while images of Native Americans are shown on the screen, may have the completely opposite effect. In a child's mind and memory those two notions, namely the image of the Native American and the word "savage" might forever be bound, even on a subconscious level, because of it being one of the first representations of a Native American ever seen in media. As a result, the idea of The Other is created, the Other that is the complete opposite of "us" and none of its characteristics should be desirable for "us."

In the movie, there are also numerous portrayals of mimicry: "Mimicry *repeats* rather than *re-presents*" (Bhabha, 1994: 88). One of the most obvious ones would be the way in which Meeko the raccoon and Percy the pug imitate each other's actions and mannerisms throughout the film, providing the comic relief in the story. Also, they mimic the people that are around them, adopting certain items of clothing and attitudes from them. "Mimicry conceals no presence or identity behind its mask" as Bhabha (1994: 88) said, and the film using animals to portray one of the clearest examples of mimicry in the film is, intentionally or not, a very clear example of that. The raccoon and the pug do not do what they do because of their ideologies or because there is a rational, logical train of thought behind their actions. They simply imitate what they see, in an attempt to feel included in the communities they belong to, to become a part of the new cultures that they encounter and to show each other and the humans around them that they are worthy of being taken seriously.

While it might seem preposterous to even ponder the concept of mimicry in relation to animals, when it comes to Disney animals, the analysis does have a basis.

As is universally known, throughout the history of the studio, animals have frequently been used to express human behavior. Meeko and Percy are not merely pets, but an extension of their owners. For example, Meeko's curiosity and resourcefulness mirror Pocahontas' willingness to explore new ideas and to challenge societal norms. On the other hand, Percy, the pampered and snobbish pug, embodies Governor Ratcliffe's arrogance and self-importance. His obsession with luxury and disdain for wilderness parallel Ratcliffe's greed and disregard for the newly conquered natural environment. Therefore, Meeko and Percy are more than simple pets, they possess anthropomorphic qualities that invite scrutiny into the dynamics of mimicry, within this context.

In examining *Pocahontas* through a Postcolonial lens, it becomes evident that the film both challenges and unintentionally reinforces certain colonial perspectives. The movie opens with a song that, ironically, highlights the colonizers' misplaced confidence in their prior knowledge of the new world and, therefore, the power and authority they have over the land and its inhabitants. Mimicry, portrayed through characters like Meeko and Percy, offers a nuanced exploration of cultural exchange and the desire for inclusion. In conclusion, *Pocahontas* navigates the complexities of Postcolonial critique, simultaneously challenging and inadvertently reinforcing Euro-central perspectives and stereotypes.

Judith Butler defines the way we act as gendered individuals as a performative act. Gender is not an inherent trait, but a socially constructed performance, that is repeated extensively throughout generations. In *Pocahontas,* the main character was intended to challenge traditional gender roles. Pocahontas is portrayed as being independent, curious and having agency over her actions. However, she is also portrayed as having to obey her father, asking her to be mostly passive in the fights her community is engaged in. Foraging food for the warriors, strolling around, spending time with her animal companions, talking with her female friends or with super-natural, fairy godmother-like, beings singing or falling in love are the main actions she undertakes throughout the movie. As these are all traditionally viewed as "female" actions, especially in Disney movies, Pocahontas' character hardly challenges any traditional gender roles. Even her role as a mediator between the colonizers and her community is not necessarily a role traditionally associated with masculinity, even though the role of a mediator between two cultures would usually be assigned to a man. However, I would argue that in this scenario she is not acting as a mediator between the two cultures, but as a mediator towards her love interest and her father. The fact that those two are the symbols, and the personification, of the two cultures is inconsequential for her role. At the bottom line, she is not concerned with the diplomatic relationships between the two communities, but with the approval of her father of John Smith and vice-versa.

In Judith Halberstam's framework, Pocahontas' character could be analyzed from the perspective of a tomboy. Tomboyism, she argues, is very often "read as a sign of independence" (Helberstam, 2004: 938). Pocahontas is presented as being

independent, wanting to make her own decisions and to be free. However, Halberstam also argues that this attitude is only accepted as long as it is finite. Fairly early in the film, her father, Chief Powhatan, lets Pocahontas know that she is also expected to renounce her independence and to "take your place among our people. Even the wild mountain stream must someday join the big river" (Pocahontas, 1995: 8). Her independence is only valued as long as she obeys her father and follows his advice of getting married, as she is of age, according to him.

On the topic of gender and sexuality, D'Entremont (1995: 1302) has argued that Governor Ratcliffe might be hinted to be homosexual. His actions do seem to point in that direction, given his lack of romantic interest in any of the female characters and his primary focus being on gold, fashion and comfort. Also, the only reason for the other men obeying him is his status, not their genuine support for him as a leader, turning up against him, in the end. This has never been confirmed by the writers or producers, therefore it cannot be stated with complete certainty. However, if Governor Ratcliffe was intended to be gay, this is not clearly explored in the movie, even though it could have been another example of Otherness and, most importantly, it could have been a bridge between the white and the Native cultures. As Natives were more open to gender and sexuality fluidity, the Governor's homosexuality could have been embraced in this new world. By giving the villain of the movie some attributes that hint at homosexuality, Disney could actually be accused of trying to make young viewers afraid of any displays of it and of associating evilness with homosexuality.

To recapitulate, *Pocahontas* sets out as a movie that portrays some instances of challenges of traditional gender roles. However, those attempts are terribly superficial, not exactly completed or emphasized and the film ends up actually reinforcing several traditional gender roles and stereotypes, rather than challenging them or providing an alternative script for the young audience. As the movie was released in the '90s, one could argue that even those small-scale attempts at challenging gender stereotypes were enough, especially in the context of a children's film. However, Pocahontas ends up being the embodiment of the stereotypical Disney princess, with a few of her actions breaking away from the traditionally established role. Moreover, the hints towards Governor Ratcliffe's sexuality seem to cause more for an already marginalized community.

To conclude, while harboring evident intentions to challenge them, *Pocahontas* inadvertently becomes entangled in a web of reinforced stereotypes. In the Postcolonial framework, the portrayal of the Native Americans becomes a complex terrain. The repeated use of terms like "savages" and the depiction of the indigenous characters through a lens tainted with Eurocentric assumptions contribute to the reinforcement of colonial stereotypes. Mimicry is mainly presented as a provider of comedic relief, and not as a harsh reality in the context of colonization. As this is a children's movie, the expectations cannot be extreme, even though a fair representation of a Native community was anticipated. The narrative strives to

transcend traditional boundaries, presenting the Native American culture in a "new light," one that would end at least some stereotypical views of the community. However, it ends up presenting the Native Americans in a series of clichés, that are almost indiscernible from the previous representations of Native Americans. Pocahontas is supposed to be a strong, independent female protagonist who defies gender norms and has the agency to design her own destiny. However, upon closer scrutiny, the movie's attempts at subversion often backslide into reinforcing deeply ingrained stereotypes, in terms of gender performativity and following pre-established scripts. Despite its initial aspirations, the film struggles to untangle itself from the pervasive threads of stereotypical portrayers of both the Native community and gender roles. The unintended consequences of reinforcing these stereotypes serve as a reminder of the complexity that is inherent in trying to dismantle deeply rooted views on both gender and culture(s).

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