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CHRISTIAN TRADITION AND GERMANIC FATALISM IN EARLY ANGLO-SAXON LITERATURE

Abstract

The intersection of Germanic tradition, particularly fatalism (*wyrd*), and Christian elements forms a crucial thematic aspect in early medieval literature. *Wyrd* dictates the inevitability of loss, decay, and hardships, ultimately leading to greater loss. The conflict usually arises from the incongruences between the two. However, at times, the Christian tradition provides some form of consolation, establishing a new set of values on the remnants of what seems to be an obsolete culture. In a changing society, this duality comes as a bridge, unifying these contrasting views. This article aims to demonstrate how Anglo-Saxon literature did not merely replace Germanic traditions with Christianity, but instead wove them into a syncretic cultural tapestry. By analyzing texts such as *The Ruin*, *Beowulf*, and *The Dream of the Rood*, I aim to capture how societal shifts emerged in literature, via a dynamic, evolving discourse, in which oxymoronic dualities (heroism and faith) can coexist.

General Context: Between *Wyrd* and Word

Early medieval Anglo-Saxon literature emerges from a period of deep cultural convergence. As Germanic tribes settled in post-Roman Britain and gradually adopted the Christian faith, their heroic, oral traditions came into contact with beliefs such as spiritual redemption and eschatological hope. The outcome is not a simple replacement of one vision by another but a rich and often tense syncretism: Christian salvation narratives intertwine with Germanic fatalism and heroic endurance. This tension puts in motion convergent ideas, which, combined harmoniously, create a rich, complex tapestry of society, expressed via cultural and literary folkloric pieces, such as “*The Ruin*,” *Beowulf*, and “*The Dream of the Rood*”.

This article aims to demonstrate the smooth transition of societal customs and traditions, using these texts as references. This period juxtaposes the redemptive vision of Christian doctrine with the sombre determinism of *Wyrd*. Christian symbols (Crucifixion, resurrection, final judgment) are filtered through a heroic lens, while the underlying fatalism of the Germanic tradition hovers over these narratives. The result is a body of syncretic literature, at once elegiac and transcendent, where the certainty of loss marks all acts of courage.

“*The Ruin*”: Glory Lost to Fate or Faith in God?

“*The Ruin*,” an *Exeter Book* elegy, meditates on the decaying remains of a once-glorious city, likely the Roman Baths at Bath. From the opening line: “*Wrætlic is þes wealstan, wyrde gebraecon*” (“Wondrous is this wall-stone, broken by fate”) (1), the

poem assigns *Wyrd*, the impersonal force of fate, as the primary agent of decay. This immediately grounds the text in the Germanic tradition, where destiny is portrayed as a fierce power shaping both human life and the fate of empires.

Despite its subject, the poem's tone is not sorrowful but reverent. The speaker recalls the city's former grandeur: "Beorht wæron burhhlafas, burnsele monige" ("bright were the castle halls," "many the bath-houses") (14–15) with a sense of nostalgia for what once was. As R.F. Leslie observes, "The Ruin" "emphasises not only the fragility of human achievement but also the way in which the passage of time transforms physical ruins into symbols of human pride and divine judgment" (Leslie, 1961: 104). The city, thus, becomes a layered symbol: a monument to human greatness and a meditation on mortality at once, mirroring the Christian idea that worldly glory is fleeting and ultimately futile.

Although *Wyrd* is designated as the destructive force, the poem contains no overt references to Christian salvation or divine purpose. The Christian element does not appear in some sort of consolation via theological or biblical references. This absence is the mark of a highly pagan society, one where fate is an inexplicable force, and the human will is powerless. Adrian Papahagi explains that in Old English literature, *Wyrd* represents "an impersonal force that dictates the course of events, often leaving little room for human agency" (Papahagi, 2014: 88). This attitude governs the poem, showcasing the universal attitude towards decay and the lost glory of the older days.

The Christian element, however, can be interpreted as the act of remembrance itself. Recalling the beauty and grandeur of the fallen city, the speaker preserves it against total oblivion. This action resonates with the Christian creed that memory is a commemorative and spiritual way of reaching the higher self. Through this reflection, the poem transcends its pagan fatalism and opens space for Christian interpretation. The ruins become a mirror for human transience, inviting contemplation on the brevity of life and the vanity of worldly pursuits while suggesting that remembrance offers its form of redemption.

***Beowulf* and How a Pagan King Becomes a Christian Martyr**

Among Old English heroic narratives, *Beowulf* represents the most intricate fusion of Germanic fatalism and Christian ethical thought. It is deeply rooted in the warrior ethos (valour, loyalty, and the pursuit of enduring fame). Still, it has adapted to the Christian framework, which started to take over society. Hence, divine judgment, humility, and the inevitability of death become part of the eminence of the narrative. Rather than resolving these worldviews, *Beowulf* allows them to overlap, creating a text where *Wyrd* and Providence cohabit rather than contradict. *Beowulf* himself articulates this dual perspective. Before his battle with Grendel's mother, he declares, "Gæð a wyrd swa hio scel" ("Fate always goes as it must") (455), echoing the Germanic belief in a preordained and impersonal destiny. Nevertheless, just lines

earlier, the narrator offers a contrasting view: “God must decide / who will be given to death’s cold grip” (440–441). The juxtaposition reveals the poem’s syncretic nature, where pagan resignation is tempered with Christian agency. As Adrian Papahagi observes, “[t]he dialectics between fate and Providence, between the hero’s quest for glory and Christian humility, shapes a literature in which *wyrd* is never simply denied but reinterpreted” (Papahagi, 2014: 121). *Beowulf* accepts fatalism outright but reframes it within a Christian framework that affirms both divine oversight and the heroic virtue of perseverance in the face of doom.

J.R.R. Tolkien, in his landmark essay *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*, famously remarked that “it is in *Beowulf* that a poet has devoted a whole poem to the theme of man at war with the hostile world, and his inevitable overthrow in Time” (Tolkien, 1984: 18). For Tolkien, *Beowulf*’s central struggle is not just with monsters but with mortality itself. His final act—facing the dragon fully knowing his death—reveals a profound moral vision. It is an act of duty, not despair; he asks only to be remembered: “Bid the warriors raise / a barrow after my burning / on the headland by the sea” (2802–2804). In the heroic world, remembrance (*lof*) functions as a secular form of eternity. This longing for memory subtly mirrors Christian hopes for salvation. His death, while framed in heroic terms, acquires a redemptive dimension. He becomes not just a warrior-king but a protector who gives his life to others. Ultimately, *Beowulf* does not choose between fate and faith. Instead, it preserves both traditions in tension, allowing *Wyrd* to speak alongside divine judgment and heroic glory to coexist with Christian humility. In doing so, the poem becomes a cultural bridge between two worldviews, one that honours the heroic past while anticipating a Christian future.

Christ as a Germanic Secular Hero in “The Dream of the Rood”

Contrasting *Beowulf*, which balances harmoniously Germanic heroic culture and the Christian elements of a follower of Christ, “The Dream of the Rood” offers a more organic integration of these traditions, reimagining the Crucifixion through the lens of Germanic heroism. In this deeply symbolic poem, the Cross becomes a narrator, a conscious, suffering participant in the Passion of Christ - and the Crucifixion itself is presented not as passive victimhood but as the voluntary and courageous act of a divine warrior. The tone is established early in the Cross’s recollection of Christ’s approach: “Geseah ic þa frean mancynnes / efstan elne mycle þæt he me wolde on gestigan” (“Then I saw the Lord of mankind hasten with great courage to climb upon me”) (33–34). Here, Christ is cast in unmistakably heroic terms: he “hastens” to his fate, not unlike an Anglo-Saxon warrior advancing into battle. The Cross further affirms: “þa me heht min hlaford / þær ic sceolde fæste standan” (“My Lord ordered me there where I had to stand firm”) (42–43). These verses evoke the heroic ideal of loyalty and endurance, as the Cross itself becomes Christ’s loyal retainer, upholding him through suffering. Carol Jean Wolf emphasises this transformation of Christ’s

image, observing that: “Christ is not a passive victim but a heroic figure who boldly ascends the Cross, just as a warrior approaches the battlefield” (Wolf, 1970: 205). The diction used - “elne mycle” (“with great courage”) - is conventionally reserved in Old English poetry for feats of valour, yet here it sanctifies a moment of ultimate surrender and sacrifice.

In this vision, the traditional concept of *Wyrd* is not discarded but repurposed. The poem subtly absorbs the pagan sense of inexorable fate into the Christian narrative of divine providence. The Crucifixion is thus no longer a tragedy governed by impersonal fate but the fulfilment of a redemptive plan. As Éamonn Ó Carragáin notes, “The Dream of the Rood” “transforms the traditional heroic vision into a liturgical one, where the martial and the sacred converge to express a distinctly Christian triumph” (O’Carragáin, 2005: 104).

The Cross itself undergoes a dual transformation—first as a literal tree, “þæt wæs geara iu, ic þæt gyta geman” (“It was years ago, I still remember that”) (28), then as an exalted relic bearing both wounds and glory. Its narrative arc parallels Christ’s: both are mocked, tortured, then glorified. The merging of their fates becomes a metaphor for Christian participation in divine suffering and, ultimately, salvation.

The narrator’s spiritual transformation, culminating in his longing for union with Christ in heaven—“ic wene me daga gehwylce / hwænne me dryhtnes rod / þe ic her on eorþan ær sceawode, / on þyssum lænan life, / gebringe to þam beorhtan dreame” (“I hope every day when the Lord’s Cross, which I once saw here on earth, may bring me out of this fleeting life into eternal joy”) (27–131)—mirrors the Christian path from fear and sorrow to spiritual longing and eternal reward.

In sum, “The Dream of the Rood” reconciles and transcends the Anglo-Saxon heroic ethos with Christian theology. The language of martial courage and *lof* (glory) is reoriented toward spiritual ends, sanctifying traditional values through the redemptive message of the Cross. The result is a profoundly moving synthesis of faith and cultural identity, where *Wyrd* is no longer an end but a passage toward eternal life.

The Reconciliation in Poetry: From *Wyrd* to Redemption

When read together, “The Ruin,” *Beowulf*, and “The Dream of the Rood” depict a complex tapestry of society born from the dialogue between the two main protagonists (Germanic fatalism and Christian hope). These poems do not illustrate a linear movement from paganism to Christianity but rather a syncretic approach present in all aspects of society of the times. In this context, oral Germanic traditions are not discarded but reframed through new theological lenses. “The Ruin” is perhaps the most resolutely pagan in tone. From its opening, “Wrætlic is þes wealstan, wyrde gebræcon” (“Wondrous is this wall-stone, broken by fate”) (1), the poem ascribes the decay of the city to *Wyrd*, offering no explicit theological framework for consolation or moral meaning. The poem’s silence on divine judgment

or salvation reinforces this impression. Adrian Papahagi argues that in Old English literature, *Wyrd* represents a "neutral, implacable force," largely indifferent to human agency (Papahagi, 2014: 81). In this light, the ruins become a sombre emblem of impermanence, with no redemptive closure, only the reverent act of memory.

In *Beowulf*, the interplay between pagan and Christian ideologies is more pronounced. Beowulf himself acknowledges fate's dominion: "Gæð a wyrd swa hio scel!" ("Fate goes ever as it must") (455). However, throughout the poem, there are references to divine judgment, humility, and a moral code that aligns with Christian teachings. Tolkien observes that *Beowulf* is steeped in "an atmosphere of deep and noble melancholy," rooted in the inevitability of death and the transience of earthly glory (Tolkien, 1984: 22). Papahagi similarly notes that *Beowulf's* greatness lies in portraying a hero who accepts fate without illusion, achieving dignity not through victory but through courageous endurance (Papahagi, 2014: 105). The poem thus reflects a world where Christian and Germanic values exist in tandem, often in unresolved tension.

"The Dream of the Rood" offers a different kind of synthesis. Here, the heroic code is entirely subsumed into Christian symbolism. Christ is portrayed not as a passive victim but as a warrior-king: "efstan elne mycle" ("he hastened with great courage") (34). The Cross, personified and loyal, recounts: "Rod wæs ic aræred. Ahof ic ricne Cyning" ("I was raised a cross. I lifted the mighty King") (44–45). This martial language transforms the Crucifixion into a heroic act, suggesting that fate is reinterpreted within a divine plan. As Donoghue points out, Old English religious poetry often retains the fatalistic lexicon of the past while reorienting it toward Christian teleology (Donoghue, 2004: 49). In "The Dream of the Rood," *Wyrd* becomes a vehicle not of despair but of transformation.

Final Resolutions and Conclusions

To conclude, together, these texts map out a cultural moment of spiritual negotiation. "The Ruin" mourns a world lost to time but offers no salvation, consolation, or other Christian/theological aspects. *Beowulf* depicts the perfect dynamic between fatalism and faith. It reveals the endurance of heroic values under the shadow of divine judgment. "The Dream of the Rood" reconciliates this tension by integrating heroic virtue into the Christian redemption narrative. What unites all three is a profound meditation on impermanence. Whether depicted in the stones of a ruined city, a hero's final stand, or Christ's redemptive suffering, these works all seize the fragility of the human condition. Nevertheless, in each case, remembrance, courage, and spiritual reflection offer continuity in the face of loss. Thus, the Anglo-Saxon poetic imagination embraces both the sorrow of fate and the hope of transcendence, crafting simultaneously elegiac and aspirational literature.

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THEORY OF MIND AND GENDER IN *THE WIFE OF THE KENITE*

Abstract

This paper explores the role of Theory of Mind, meaning the cognitive ability to attribute mental states to oneself and others, in literary interpretation by taking into consideration not only its correlation with social position (with a focus on how gender plays a role in interactions and perceived social dynamics), but also related elements of cognitive narratology. The resulting theoretical framework is then applied to Agatha Christie's *The Wife of the Kenite*, expanding on the limited studies dealing with her early short stories and investigating the dynamics taking place between the characters of this text with a focus on the cognitive aspect, while also borrowing a feminist perspective on the conservative writer's early prose.

Cognitive literary theory is a field emerging across disciplines, about which Fludernik notes that it "resembles a group of construction sites" (2010: 927) with different approaches focusing on different aspects of literature, language, or cognitive science. In this essay, I will first introduce a theoretical framework based on the relationship between Theory of Mind and fiction reading, drawing on the work of Zunshine and making use of some notions proposed by Rabinowitz. Secondly, I will apply the framework to a reading of the short story, "The Wife of the Kenite" by Agatha Christie, examining the insights that can be accessed through it, specifically the characters' asymmetrical reading of each other.

To begin with, Theory of Mind (ToM) is a term that was first coined by Premack and Woodruff, and it refers to an ability that both humans and other species possess: simply put, "saying that an individual has a theory of mind, we mean that the individual imputes mental states to himself and to others" (Premack and Woodruff, 1978: 515). If one takes into consideration a cognitive framework for expanding literary theory, this ability and its theoretical implications are crucial not only for fiction creation, but also for comprehension and interpretation. Specifically, "fiction engages, teases and pushes to its tentative limits our mind-reading capacity" (Zunshine, 2006: 4), meaning our ToM. This happens automatically; it is effortless and intuitive (2006: 16), and it might not necessarily lead one to a correct evaluation of the other's state of mind (2006: 13).

Furthermore, in describing complex social dynamics, the term *embedding* is used to describe relations of mental states and then assess their patterns as levels of what Zunshine termed *sociocognitive complexity* (2012: 13), the same scholar noting that "literature, as we know it today [...] cannot function on lower than the third level of embedding" (2022: 4). While it was previously stated that ToM happens effortlessly, highlighting it in literary analysis requires one to structure this

automatic, intuitive process into representational language (2022: 3). To highlight the levels of embedment and how this professor illustrates them, the following examples are useful: “My last name begins with a Z’ contains no mental states, embedded or otherwise,” however, “I wonder if the teacher realizes that I’m hoping that she won’t call on me today because my last name begins with a Z and will thus on purpose start at the end of the list’ contains three embedded mental states” (2022: 2).

Undoubtedly, some characteristics of ToM-based literary theory described by scholars should be presented at this point. Drawing again on Zunshine’s work, there are two observations to be retrieved. Firstly, mental states may be directly stated or indirectly understood or interpreted: “negotiating complex social situations depended on combining explicit discussions of one’s own and other people’s mental states with implicit attributions of thoughts and feelings to oneself and others,” which leads the critic to affirm that this “means that when works of literature combine explicitly spelled-out and implied mental states, they mimic and intensify patterns of mindreading that recurred throughout our evolutionary history” (2022: 110). These patterns also depend on context in general, or genre in literature, if one considers the idea that “the kind of mind-reading that we use in the process of selecting and courting a mate is on some important level quite different from the mind-reading we deploy when we try to escape a predator” (2006: 145).

Secondly, the critic poses the following question: “How do writers (intuitively) decide who should be more capable of complex embedment and who should be less so and what it may mean in the context of their stories?” (2022: 59) The answer ties cognitive ToM-based analysis to the analysis of hierarchy, keeping in mind that “people in weaker social positions engage in more active and perceptive mindreading than do people in stronger social positions” (2022: 62), the latter sometimes happening strategically or intentionally (2022: 63). Moreover, “factors other than social status (along the lines of class, race, or gender) may influence the author’s intuitive decision to make one character more socio-cognitively complex than another” (2022: 66).

In addition to the previously stated points, another scholar whose contributions may help configure the framework later used in this essay’s reading of Agatha Christie’s work is Peter Rabinowitz, for his ideas regarding cognitive narratology. In his essay, “Toward a Narratology of Cognitive Flavor,” he draws on Zunshine’s work on ToM and literature, expanding it with notions useful for interpreting the complications arising from (fictional) minds interacting with each other. In particular, he playfully uses the term “flavor” for the different implications arising from narrators’ and/or characters’ reading of each other. Thus, “I am going to be arguing that the cognitive flavor of any narrative moment is largely dependent on (although not fully determined by) the configuration of exchange between mind-reader and mind-writer” (2015: 88).

Regarding the latter participant, Peter Rabinowitz offers “a new term to the equation: for every act of mind-reading, there has to be at least one equivalent act of

mind-writing,” which he exemplifies by making use of Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*, particularly a scene of Marcel describing others, “the parallel act of mind-writing—in this case, a legible, nearly material, expression of inner thoughts” (2015: 88). Furthermore, taking into account the generally high levels of complex embedments to be found in literary works, complications are to be expected in the interactions that make up so-called cognitive flavors. Rabinowitz himself lists some of them: emotional valence, depth, reciprocity, multiplicity, angle, occlusion, mode, consistency (2015: 89-92). As far as this essay is concerned, the following are taken into account: emotional valence can be defined by the affective charge accompanying ToM – information is not always neutral; depth can be defined, essentially, as Zunshine’s notion of embedment levels, which she borrows from cognitive science; reciprocity can be defined as the extent to which an exchange takes place (2015: 89); occlusion can be defined as a degree of opacity often related to the factors of sincerity and perspicacity (2015: 90). These terms and their functionality as critical devices may suffice for the short story reading in the applicatory part of this work.

Turning to the work of literature this essay is concerned with, “The Wife of the Kenite,” it is worth noting some aspects about the writer first. Agatha Christie: “she has been outsold only by the Bible and Shakespeare, with sales figures exceeding two billion copies, and she has been translated into more languages than any other writer” (Evans and Bernthal, 2023: 4) – a popular writer, read and enjoyed by many. However, not all of her literary works have received the same amount of attention. Thus, in “Reading Christie with a Feminist Lens,” Mary Anna Evans addresses the following aspect:

As I have noted, the size of Christie’s oeuvre and the long delay in its receiving attention have resulted in a focus in the literature on longer works to the detriment of the short stories, which have been overshadowed by the books’ success and obscured by their own very number. This is a particularly significant omission in the study of her earliest stories, as they show evidence of her efforts to maintain her feminine self-expression when faced with formulaic of a male-coded genre and industry. (2023: 93-94)

Accordingly, “The Wife of the Kenite” is one of the texts that are relevant to analyze, and about which Evans also makes some observations in the same work. While “Christie remains instinctively conservative on erotic and professional social arrangements” (Rowland, 2001: 159), this essay is not concerned with her autobiography except to a small extent regarding the circumstances of her creations, and is instead more interested in a reading of this short story. It is worthwhile to recognize that an author “need not call herself a feminist nor be female for her writing to be concerned with ‘feminist’ questions of power, gender and the social roles of women” (2001: 157). In this case, at an intuitive mind-reading and mind-writing level in her creative process, the concern is how social dynamics play a role in detectable

mental state attributions, while also using Rabinowitz's previously defined configurations or complications.

Mary Anna Evans writes that Agatha Christie's early short stories meet her criterion "for feminist potential in that they explore feminist questions of power" despite her also being known "as a conservative voice speaking against women's new rights and freedoms" (2023: 95). The critic highlights "an assessment of the feminist potential she created by crafting female characters who took advantage of a changing world" (2023: 96). Regarding "The Wife of the Kenite," the same critic notes that its feminist potential resides in its intrinsic questioning of power, gender, and social roles because the woman protagonist assumes power (2023: 97).

Proceeding further, this text is not a whodunit, it does not make use of a narrative involving a detective, but it is instead a story about vengeance. To briefly summarize the plot, Herr Schaefer comes across Mr. Henshel's farm and is served a meal by his wife, whom he believes is Dutch, and whom he does not think he has met before. A sense of uneasiness permeates him, but he cannot explain it. He is poisoned by the woman, who is actually Flemish, and whose child he had murdered during the war when he was with the German Army in Belgium, while her previous husband was away from home, as the woman reveals when the poison begins to take effect. The story uses free indirect discourse, but the narrator also comments on their own opinion. Returning to Schaefer's first assessment of the woman, the following can be observed: he feels relieved to have entered Henshel's home and looks at the woman "with a measure of appreciation. He admired the Dutch, wide-bosomed type such as this. A grand creature, with her full breast and her wide hips (...) His requirements of women were primitive and simple" (Christie, 2019: 191). This "primitive and simple" view of women will be noticeable in the passages before he realizes her power over him, especially in the segment when they share a meal, confirming gender as a category relevant to ToM as a perceived social position. Before that, however, the following passage is relevant in that it can be read in terms of emotional valence, reciprocity, and occlusion:

The Dutch woman shook her head. A strange ecstatic smile irradiated her broad features. 'There is no chance—only God. Enter, then.' Approving her sentiments, for Herr Schaefer liked a woman to be religious, he crossed the threshold. She drew back to let him pass, the smile still lingering on her face, and just for a moment the thought that there was something here he did not quite understand flashed across Herr Schaefer's mind. He dismissed the idea as of little importance. (2019: 191)

Herr Schaefer says he came across the farm by chance, but the woman credits this event to God – foreshadowing her religion-fueled vengeance. Thus, that information is clearly not neutral, but filled with strong emotion, her smile indicating her excitement to poison the man who had murdered her child. Schaefer senses there is something more going on, but he does not pursue the thought further, thus avoiding giving her any importance: regarding reciprocity, an exchange does not

really take place and embeddings remain on the second level; regarding occlusion, Schaefer shows no perspicacity except at a surface level, and the woman's sincere joy does not betray her intentions.

When Schaefer and Mr. and Mrs. Henshel have dinner, she is silent as her husband makes conversation, and the guest pays attention to him, "Henshel continued to talk (...). Schaefer contended himself with monosyllables and appropriate grunts" (2019: 192). Therefore, Schaefer maintains the conversation with appropriate responses: despite being very tired, he uses his ToM to interact properly with his host. After dinner, the feeling of uneasiness described before, during the interaction with Mrs. Henshel, persists: "His uneasiness was not allayed. Yet what was it that he feared? Surely not that Henshel would give him up to the police?" (2019: 193) While it was the woman's behavior that first caused this feeling, he first thinks of her husband. Dismissing the sensation once again, it takes more time before him finally admitting to himself that the woman is the cause, when they talk while Mr. Henshel is away:

'I had one child. It died. . . ' 'Ach! I am sorry,' said Schaefer, kindly. The woman did not answer. She stood there motionless. And suddenly Schaefer's uneasiness returned a hundred-fold. Only this time, he connected it definitely—not with the house, not with Henshel, but with this slow-moving, grandly fashioned woman - his wife of Henshel's who was neither English nor Dutch. (2019: 193)

Only after being uneasy for some time and after ruling out Mr. Henshel as the cause does Schaefer pay attention to the woman, having resisted until this point in the story, to reflect on her behavior, with gender as an influencing factor regarding social position. However, curiosity is now instilled in the character, and thus, even though occlusion as a degree of opacity weakens at this point, no considerable mind-writing has taken place on Schaefer's side yet. The woman, however, serves him poisoned coffee and prepares for the right moment to explain who she is and why she is seeking vengeance. When Schaefer finally understands that he is in danger in "a flash of sheer desperate fear" (2019: 195), the woman reads him perfectly:

She marked the growth of consciousness in his eyes, and answered it as though he had actually spoken. "Yes, I will tell you now. You remember passing through a place called Voogplaat, in Belgium?" (2019: 195)

She reminds Schaefer of how he murdered her young son. Schaefer tries to deny, cry, and justify his actions in light of the war. The woman credits God for bringing Schaefer to her. In the following passage, the woman highlights the lack of reciprocity between the two from all the previous interactions (in Rabinowitz's sense), the emotional valence on her side (by means of the reference to God), and her intentional opacity until that point: "I recognised you at once this afternoon in spite of your beard. You did not recognise me. You said it was chance led you here—but I

knew it was God...'" (2019: 195). She recognized him, she knew he had not recognized her (three embedments, a constant depth from the point of view of the woman – in contrast with Schaefer's initial simple assessment of her) and, in terms of emotional valence, she was happy to avenge her son and imbued this emotion with religious faith. The story ends with her reading the Bible and Schaefer screaming.

All in all, Schaefer and Mrs. Henshel employ ToM asymmetrically regarding each other, with the former's view of women (as commented by the narrator and quoted above) playing a role in the presented dynamic. Therefore, a cognitive framework based on ToM's role in fiction proves useful for providing insights when applied to the short story, highlighting specific aspects of the interactions between characters, evaluating socio-cognitive complexity, and investigating the elements influencing how their mind-reading unfolds.

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DECONSTRUCTION OF VICTORIAN IDENTITY IN *THE STRANGE CASE OF DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE*

Abstract

In the context of the rigid norms and restrictions of the late nineteenth century, R.L. Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* deconstructs the concept of identity as understood at that time by using the Victorians' own ideas and principles efficiently against it. This article examines how Stevenson destabilizes the notion of a unified self by portraying Jekyll's divided consciousness through religious imagery, architectural symbolism, and scientific experimentation.

The Victorian era was characterized by rigid norms, unspoken conventions, and religious strictness that led to the development over time of a tangible layer of hypocrisy and double lives. This article examines how Stevenson undermines an artificial, though socially useful, understanding of identity as a unitary, continuous form of self. It is this undermining that leads to Dr. Jekyll's apparent downfall.

As Peter Childs (2002:67) suggests in his study, Victorian era was characterized by puritan standards that were claiming to use divine authority to enforce society's authority to manipulate citizens' lives into blind submission. As a writer charting the transition from tradition to modernism, Stevenson outlines a life liberated from the morality imposed by Victorians, as he unfolds a possible version of living without the austere directives preached by society. He builds this version by apparently upholding traditional values only to turn them on their head in a narrative that makes readers sympathize greatly with the fallen character. These traditional values are articulated in social norms, but also in the biblical echoes used in Stevenson's novella. As Linehan (2006: 7) notices the text offers "a discomfiting critique of Victorian society's liability towards rote uses of Scripture which lay the groundwork for the hypocrisies and repressions of religious cant," thus exposing how religious discourse become a vehicle for moral repression rather than genuine faith.

To show society's hypocrisy and unrealistic standards, Stevenson creates a portrait of these values through Dr. Jekyll's double life. This aspect is underlined as well in the protagonist's way of describing his actions, which are seen "like the Babylonian finger on the wall, to be spelling out the letters of my judgment" (Stevenson, 2008: 78). The same tension emerges in the profane comparison of Jekyll's persona with a "city of refuge" (Linehan, 2006: 19). Linehan observes that, in Judeo-Christian tradition, such cities functioned as sanctuaries for individuals who had committed unintentional homicide, though they did not confer exemption from responsibility (2006: 19). Rather than absolving the offender, they offered temporary

protection while leaving the final judgement to the local community. The use of Scripture appears almost as a cognitive dissonance in the context of the corrupted way of living the character that claims that he can lead his life as he aspires and at the same time relies on his safe space in Jekyll's life, presented as an honorable, moral physician that conforms to society and church standards.

Identity is a very problematic concept to work with. How do we define identity? Is it just another facet of somebody's personality or something we are born with? As John Locke (1690: 22) states in his essay, "personal identity can by us be placed in nothing but consciousness, (which is that alone which makes what we call SELF)" we can observe that Stevenson starts a question of the unitary identity in Jekyll's life. This division is made noticeable in the discordance between Jekyll's and Hyde's different consciousnesses, attitudes, and standards, as we observe Jekyll not remembering the horrific acts made by Hyde. The inconsistency between the reasonable part and the decadent self is highlighted in the way Jekyll and Hyde appear to act as two different and independent personae that have in common just the distribution of the same physical body. Therefore, the two emerge as distinct people.

This self-division manifested in Dr. Jekyll since he reached the "years of reflection," as he felt that the public did not give him the liberty to express his "irregularities" (Stevenson, 2008: 68). As a consequence, the character chooses to dedicate his life to science, using the honorable profession of a doctor to find a cure for his already present duplicity. As his work continues, Jekyll realizes with stupefaction that his affection could be resolved by separating the two identities that were in perpetual tension and conflict by creating a special type of drug. Even though the protagonist is aware of the possible risks, he is overcome by the temptation of discovering a way to unleash his instinctual needs of freely expressing his sense of difference. This need for more openness could be seen in connection to the decadent trend that was already manifesting itself at that time.

The current of decadence and aestheticism had faced different opinions and definitions through the last centuries and because of that it is important to understand the proper context of this movement. As Goldfarb argues, decadent literature rejected simplicity, rational balance and formal harmony. Instead, it embodied heightened self-awareness, intellectual curiosity, excessive refinement, while also displaying morbidity and perversity (1962: 371). Thus, Jekyll's apparent decay, which is, in fact, an attempt to unravel hypocrisy, resonates perfectly with the wider decadent current.

The conflict between natural instincts and society is shown in Jekyll's battle to reconcile with the two selves that lie within him. The solution is found in hiding his inhibitions in the noble carrier of a doctor that gives Jekyll the proper ambiance to dress his personality in the values of science. By using society rules to release his forbidden desires, the protagonist unmask the pretense of Victorian society in the late nineteenth century.

The deconstruction of identity is further mirrored in the architecture of Dr. Jekyll's house, which is described as having two separate entrances. One entrance conveys an atmosphere of comfort (Stevenson, 2008: 20), while the other bears clear signs of deterioration and neglect (Stevenson, 2008: 7). This atypical structure denotes a duality in the protagonist's nature as he feels compelled to create an outlet that would allow him to unleash his natural impulses.

Ursula Czyzewska underlines the post-experimental tension felt by Henry Jekyll as he realizes that the medicine he created is no longer needed to metamorphose himself into the monstrous and decadent Mr. Hyde (2014: 22). The comprehension of this fact brings terror, as Jekyll finds himself in the impossibility of controlling his two selves. Even though he finds comfort in his Hyde identity, the protagonist becomes aware of the outlaw condition he has to learn to acquire as his definitive status, without having the refuge in his public, safe position. Therefore, he remains a prisoner of social limits, at least of their legal implications, and he realizes his conditioned conformism might be too difficult to escape without consequences. Jekyll's narrative ultimately reveals the physical and psychological consequences of this divided existence:

At all hours of the day and night, I would be taken with the premonitory shudder; above all, if I slept, or even dozed for a moment in my chair, it was always as Hyde that I awakened. Under the strain of this continually-impending doom and by the sleeplessness to which I now condemned myself, ay, even beyond what I had thought possible to man, I became, in my own person, a creature eaten up and emptied by fever, languidly weak both in body and mind, and solely occupied by one thought: the horror of my other self (Stevenson, 2008: 86).

The self-sabotage of the protagonist is revealed in this paragraph, connecting the profound longings and curiosities of the physician with the root of the failed experiment that led to the very opposite result searched by Dr. Jekyll (Czyzewska: 23). He is gradually overtaken by the reality of his horrific actions and the improper use of science, particularly when judged against the moral standards of Victorian society. This internal division becomes most explicit when Jekyll articulates the dilemma as a negotiation between loss and desire:

To cast in my lot with Jekyll, was to die to those appetites which I had long secretly indulged and had of late begun to pamper. To cast it in with Hyde, was to die to a thousand interests and aspirations, and to become, at a blow and forever, despised and friendless. The bargain might appear unequal; but there was still another consideration in the scales; for while Jekyll would suffer smartingly in the fires of abstinence, Hyde would be not even conscious of all that he had lost (Stevenson, 2008: 79).

Locke's vision on personal identity becomes visible once again in this passage, as we observe that Hyde lacks Jekyll's conscious state of mind while being his

decadent form, fact that proves that the two are forming different identities. As the philosopher asserts, "consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is that which makes everyone to be what he calls self, and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things, in this alone consists personal identity, i.e. the sameness of a rational being" (1690: 9).

Moreover, Linda Dryden (2003: 79) claims that Jekyll is presented as suffering moral insanity, which leads him to use self-deception on an unmet scale, as we observe that each self refuses to accept the presence of each other's influence. The protagonist observes his state as being a "curse of mankind" that these "incongruous fagots" are bound together, using this reflection to rationalize his divided nature and justify his actions (Stevenson, 2008: 69). This fact is highlighted especially in the case of Carew's murder, where we are witnesses to Jekyll's delirium. He argues that a morally sane individual could not have committed such an act over such a trivial cause and suggests that his blow was delivered in the same irrational manner in which an ill child might destroy a toy (Stevenson, 2008: 80). Therefore, the peak of degeneracy and decadence of society is shown in Jekyll's monstrous acts and inconsiderate attitude.

Also, Jekyll's statement exposes his own denial towards divinity, an emerging practice in the context of Victorian society at the end of nineteenth century that confronted itself with technological innovations and Darwin's evolution theory. The many-sides nature of humanity is also presented in the protagonist's argument. He suggests that human nature may ultimately be understood as a kind of community composed of many different, inconsistent, and independent elements (Stevenson, 2008: 69). This suggests that the struggle between opposing impulses is not an anomaly, but rather a fundamental condition of human nature.

In conclusion, we can observe the way Stevenson skillfully uses the society's rules and convention to show its rotten substance and to undress the previous hidden concepts of identity, by deconstructing it and peeling it of all the existing layers. The author does this by presenting Dr. Jekyll choosing a profession that is respectable on a social plan, but also that provided him with a proper space to heal himself from his abnormalities. As shown, the protagonist failed in finding a medication to help him recover from his inclinations. Jekyll continued to push conventions, creating an artificial normality by throwing parties, meeting friends, performing acts of charity, yet he failed as his effort grew increasingly harder to sustain, as the rift in himself was more and more tangible. The doctor's efforts conclude by directing all his impulses in Hyde's persona, as he proves incapable in following society's standards and staying true to himself at the same time.

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SISYPHUS IN THE AMERICAN LIMBO: ABSURDISM IN TENNESSEE WILLIAMS' *CAMINO REAL*

Abstract

This paper examines the absurdist dimension of Tennessee Williams' *Camino Real*, drawing on Martin Esslin's discussion of the Theatre of the Absurd. The paper argues that, despite its Romantic dimension, the play can be regarded as absurdist, both ideologically and technically. The research offers more insight into one of the least staged plays written by one of America's greatest playwrights, aiming to further explore the topic of American absurdism, which is often overshadowed by its European counterpart.

The philosophy of the absurd and the Theatre of the Absurd are interconnected yet vastly distinct issues that should be approached as such. The first section of this paper aims to clarify these aspects, as well as briefly consider how the topic of American absurdism has been previously researched in the context of *Camino Real*. What follows is an analysis of the play through the criteria which Martin Esslin considers essential to the tradition of the Theatre of the Absurd in order to further argue that Tennessee Williams' play belongs to the aforementioned movement, both in terms of the ideology it presents and the techniques it employs.

Theoretical Considerations

In his seminal work, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1960/2004), Martin Esslin places great emphasis on the difference between the philosophy of the absurd and its theatre, and he does so by taking the two thinkers whose works have been the most influential in terms of ideology for this movement, Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, as case studies. In their drama, one sees an exploration of the absurdity present in human existence, yet this is shown through events which are logically presented in a traditional dramatic sense. The Theatre of the Absurd, Esslin argues, aims to depict this acceptance of the meaningless human condition and that attempting to portray it in a rational way is ultimately ineffective (2004: page). Thus, plays which engage with this dramatic expression often tend to abandon "rational devices and discursive thought" (Esslin, 2004: page), instead adopting a conglomeration of images, usually devoid of a clear plot progression.

American drama sees little representation in *The Theatre of the Absurd*. Absurdist influence is regarded as gargantuan in European art following the tragedies that unfolded during the Second World War. Tangentially, Esslin notes that, because the United States was not subjugated by a similar crisis during this period, it did not meet the same loss of meaning and purpose (2004: page), at least

until the political failures of the 1970s. Because of this consideration, few American playwrights are mentioned in the text, and all of them are personalities of the 1960s. The most famous such example given by Esslin is that of Edward Albee, whom he sees as a representative of American absurdism due to the way in which “[Albee’s] work attacks the very foundations of American optimism” (2004: page) in various experimental ways.

Yet this American optimism had already begun to decline years before Albee’s success, and one of the places in which this decline became most apparent was the stage. Although *The Theatre of the Absurd* is not meant as an exhaustive analysis of Western theatrical tradition of the 20th century, it suffers from the flaw of viewing American drama staged before the 1960s in overly simplistic ways, when several dramatists had already decided to experiment with theatre in similar ways to their European influences, under the careful watch of the McCarthy era. Much like Albee, artists such as Tennessee Williams produced complex bibliographies comprised of both simple and more experimental works in an attempt to better represent their own views on what theatre ought to be.

Tennessee Williams’ evolution as a playwright is clearly motivated by a need to show on stage what his plastic theatre actually meant to do: that is, to express emotions through his work while focusing on its theatricality, rather than on realism. Williams accomplishes this goal by employing “unconventional techniques” to move towards a “closer approach to truth” (Williams, 1999: xix). This theory is vastly similar to that of Artaud’s, who insists that the “domain of the theatre is [...] plastic and physical” (1958: 71), which Esslin pinpoints as an essential influence on tradition of the Theatre of the Absurd (2004: page). Throughout his career, Williams begins to experiment with this physical side, but nowhere is it better exemplified than in his *Camino Real*, through its many chases, dances, and circus-like moments.

The Absurd in *Camino Real*

Camino Real is one of Tennessee Williams’ least critically analyzed plays, likely due to its initial failure. It was first staged in the same year as Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, which is often regarded as the greatest absurdist play of the 20th century, and just a couple of months after Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*, possibly the most famous theatrical result of the McCarthy era. Despite being overshadowed by these two essential plays, Williams’ drama happens to reflect several central themes similar to both its predecessors: it simultaneously tackles the claustrophobic paranoia which is characteristic of art from the second Red Scare and man’s realization that his existence is ultimately meaningless. Williams targets the individual’s need to rebel against the cage society has built around him, reflecting the artistic panic of the 1950s in a cyclical eulogy to freedom.

What sets *Camino Real* apart from other plays that deal with the absurd to this extent is its significant Romantic dimension. Williams himself states, in relation to

the play, that “romanticism is absolutely essential” (Devlin 2000: 142) and this is the lens through which most scholars such as C.W.E. Bigsby (2005), Brenda Murphy (2014), and Annette Saddik (2007) approach the play in their comprehensive works about American drama. Bigsby, however, acknowledges the absurdist aspects of the play and suggests that it puts forward two types of rebellion which are in opposition to each other: Kilroy’s and that of the romantics he interacts with (2005: 280). This duality of rebellion remains the general focus in the literature so far, as the main character is the one who struggles to understand this world the others seem to hope so much to escape, who in turn become “absurd products of their own hopes” (Bigsby, 2005: 280). The present paper tackles this aspect when considering the dreamlike quality of the play, due to an important philosophical argument laid out by Camus in his fundamental absurdist text, which explores the connection between the absurd and the Romantic.

In order to decide whether *Camino Real* can be understood as a representative of the Theatre of the Absurd, this section aims to examine the play in relation to the features Martin Esslin proposes as essential to the absurdist tradition in theatre. It is important to understand that, due to the vast experimental dimension of this topic, the four criteria presented are mere tendencies regarding both form and content, not plot construction guidelines such as those from classical and neoclassical theatre. Since it is largely impossible to portray the complexity of human existence, what absurdist drama does is examine ways in which the artist can come closer to doing so. Consequently, innovation conquers controlled technique. The traditions adopted by the Theatre of the Absurd, as grouped by Esslin, are as follows: “‘Pure’ theatre [...] Clowning, fooling, and mad-scenes, Verbal nonsense, and the Literature of dream and fantasy” (2004). What follows is an investigation into the extent to which *Camino Real* engages with the elements mentioned and fits under the umbrella of the absurd.

Pure Woman through Pure Theatre

The first tradition that Esslin sees as fundamental to the Theatre of the Absurd manifests in the dramatist’s need to return to the element of the ‘pure,’ which is a reflection of its “anti-literary attitude” (2004: page). The playwright acknowledges the same issue modernists had also been concerned about, especially after structural linguistics’ heavy influence on modern thought, that being the extreme limitations of language and its inability to truly express ideas. ‘Pure theatre’ turns away from speech and instead focuses on movement, sound, action, expression, and scenic effects evocative of the circus. Not only does this dimension innovate by bringing forward the physical, theatrical theatre, the one Artaud advocates for, but it also returns to the kind of performance that used to be seen as inferior, depraved, and cheap, which made communities such as the Puritans argue against its value. This

return to those elements represents, in itself, a juxtaposition between low and high art, an art form which dissolves the two polarities.

Camino Real embodies the element of the 'pure' altogether, but most notably during Block Eleven, which contains the central event, if one even exists, namely Esmeralda's lunar ritual. The entire scene is described as a Carnival, with its circus-like atmosphere where dialogue is limited and dancers praise the moon. Entire conversations are happening between the characters, such as the exchange between Kilroy and the Guard, without any speech. The focus is on the absurdity of the situation, which is created by the fact that Esmeralda repeats this ritual every lunar cycle, deconstructing the classic view on virginity.

Esmeralda's pagan power works as a way for her to take back her freedom, but, as happens with most of the characters in the play her freedom is controlled by another agent, in this case her mother, who gives Esmeralda the chance to choose the "hero" repeatedly. However, it is in complying with these rules that she truly rebels against her condition, because Esmeralda is one of the only ones trapped in the Camino Real who does not attempt to leave, and instead shifts her limited possibilities into becoming, practically, a seducer, similar to the way in which Camus explains Don Juan's affairs, the character in which absurdism and Romanticism meet most clearly. The philosopher explains that "it is indeed because he loves them with the same passion and each time with his whole self that he must repeat [...] his profound quest" (2005: 67), explaining why Don Juan is an example of the absurd man, despite his romantic priorities. Just as the absurd seducer treats each lover with the same intensity, for Esmeralda, "each one's the first one" (Williams, 1970: 130). Thus, she manages to rebel against the absurdity of her narrative by undoing symbols once thought of as sacred, and this moment both solidifies her as an absurd character and illustrates how such form of rebellion can be explored through 'pure theatre,' by rooting the monumental scene in the element of the physical.

Not only is Block Eleven significant for Esmeralda's character, but it also manages to convey important information about Kilroy, whose entire existence in itself is absurd, as he does not exist. While the rest of the cast is made up of literary figures and legendary historical personalities, Kilroy comes from the "Kilroy was here" graffiti soldiers used to spray on structures during the Second World War (Partridge, 2005), which is alluded to at several times during the play: "Kilroy is here and he's about to be there! – If he can help it..." (Williams, 1970: 41). He is, to both characters and audience, a mystery, and it is through movement that this mystery is explored: "Kilroy [...] goes into a triumphant eccentric dance which reviews his history as fighter, traveler and lover" (Williams, 1970: 106). Williams does not tell the audience about his protagonist's past, as written descriptions fail to express the weight of these three roles, but the actor has to instead find a way to reveal them through dance. This detail is but one example of how many of *Camino Real's* complexities stand in details which are separate from dialogue.

Clowning, Fooling, and Mad-scenes: From the Bard to Patsy

The second tradition described by Esslin as being directly influential to the Theatre of the Absurd finds its origins in the *mimus* of classical antiquity, which can be understood as a form of theatre that relied on “semi-improvised spontaneous clowning” (2004: page). This form of drama has managed to persist for millennia, despite countless attempts at demonizing it, and its influence is perhaps most evident in the vaudeville. However, clowning has always had its place in theatre, even in its less humorous forms, such as the tragedy. Esslin mentions the *First Folio* as the place where this long-standing fascination with fools, jesters, and madness is best represented (2004: page). Of course, clowning is noticeable in the almost absurd situations created by the characters in comedies, but through figures such as the Fool in *King Lear* the playwright releases some dramatic tension after the climax. This is important to mention, because, historically, high and low forms of drama alike featured clowning, as it appears in plays often considered to be cheap entertainment, such as the vaudeville, along with many Shakespearean works. Thus, clowning pervades most dramatic forms, invoking the individual’s inherent need to give in to the irrational. Absurdist theatre portrays the universal obligation to rebel against existence by simply enjoying it in the simplest ways. Following the tradition of clowning in drama throughout the years, one notices that theatre has always tried to show the absurdity of the human condition, but it is the Theatre of the Absurd that aimed to embrace it completely.

There is no shortage of jester-like figures in *Camino Real*. Be it Rosita, the prostitute who only mentions love, Abdullah, whose purpose is to emphasize how absurd his sister’s ritual is, or the Bum, who “will appear from time to time to deliver appropriate or contrapuntal song titles” (Williams, 1970: 1), Kilroy is always surrounded by characters whose purpose is to confuse him. Perhaps the most relevant episode is found in Block Six, when Gutman tries to force Kilroy to adopt the persona of Patsy. The protagonist objects vehemently: “I know what a Patsy is – he’s a clown in the circus who takes pratfalls but I’m no Patsy!” (Williams, 1970: 49). This scene demonstrates Kilroy’s rebellion against the role he was given, his attempt at escaping from his nonsensical existence, and his failure to do so. Despite his best efforts, Kilroy’s ultimate tragedy is that he really is Patsy, and that he can only really triumph over the absurdity of *Camino Real* once he accepts his role in it.

The essence of Camus’ absurdism stands in Don Quixote’s advice:

The wounds of the vanity, the many offenses our egos have to endure, being housed in bodies that age and hearts that grow tired, are better accepted with a tolerant smile—like this!—You see? [He cracks his face in two with an enormous grin.] (Williams, 1970: 159)

It is here, in Block Sixteen, that Don Quixote urges Kilroy to “imagine Sisyphus happy” (Camus, 2005: 119), because, just like the titan is doomed to push

the boulder uphill, Williams punishes Kilroy by having him run around Camino Real, from block to block, only to trap him again. According to Bigsby, by denying his characters their freedom, the playwright manages to “neutralise the liberating power of carnival” (2005: 281). Another dimension of this stands in Kilroy’s realization that he is not merely enjoying the carnival, but he is part of it, whether it is his decision or not.

Together with clowning and fooling, Esslin mentions the so-called “mad-scenes” as part of a theatrical tradition the Theatre of the Absurd follows. These moments, although universally present in drama, manage to dive into the irrational, and here work as a way of showing the audiences a “world that has gone mad” (2004: page). This descent is used as part of the critical aspect of modern drama, often exploring the present state of social crisis. *Camino Real* is first and foremost a reflection on the lack of empathy between human beings, as argued by Michael Paller in his essay *A Playwright with a Social Conscience* (2008). An example of this collective failure is the forbidden word: *Hermano*, the word for brother. When Casanova protests that the world needs this word, Gutman explains that:

GUTMAN [calmly]: Yes, the most dangerous word in any human tongue is the word for brother. It’s inflammatory.—I don’t suppose it can be struck out of the language altogether but it must be reserved for strictly private usage in back of soundproof walls. Otherwise it disturbs the population . . . (Williams, 1970: 21)

Empathy is altogether absent, each individual is on his own, and the rules are strict, yet absurd. Such is the world of Williams’ *Camino Real*, yet the only way in which one can rebel against it is not by returning to La Mancha, or leaving for Athens, but by smiling against all odds. This is the only kind of freedom present in the play.

Language and Verbal Nonsense

Verbal nonsense can be seen as part of clowning, as well as another way of fighting against the limitations of language. An explanation of why individuals are fascinated by words and phrases that carry no actual sense can be found in early psychoanalysis, as Sigmund Freud was interested in the relationship between humor and the unconscious, theorizing that when someone hears a nonsensical joke, they try to find the meaning behind it, and when the person realizes there is none, “[t]he pretence makes it possible for a moment to liberate the pleasure in nonsense” (1960: 139). In other words, verbal nonsense allows the individual to embrace utter meaningless, which to an absurdist perspective works as a way to accept that one’s own existence lacks meaning and is best enjoyed when one is conscious of it.

Several characters from *Camino Real* engage in verbal nonsense, especially the aforementioned jester-like figures. The Bum is possibly the most relevant example as Williams specifically indicates in the beginning of the play that his role is to appear every so often and either mention song titles or deliver lines that mean nothing at all:

[The Bum sticks his head out the window and shouts:]

BUM: Pa dam, Pa dam, Pa dam!

THE BARON [continuing the Bum's song]: Echoes the beat of my heart! Pa dam, Pa dam—hello! (Williams, 1970: 38)

This exchange is one of the many in the play in which characters speak to each other in seemingly empty words, with the Bum working as the perfect agent of nonsense.

Another such character is the Gypsy, who, mostly preoccupied with upholding traditions among the residents of the Camino Real, and acts as a wise matriarchal figure. The Gypsy simultaneously values rules and undoes them, possessing a pessimistic awareness of the world. She is the one who assures Kilroy that nothing he owns matters and that “Camino Real is just a funny paper read backwards” (Williams, 1970: 114), hinting at the loss of meaning in any of the actions taking place. She, just like the Bum, makes use of verbal nonsense in her conversations with Nursie, suggesting that whether or not Kilroy is here or not, it does not really matter. By appealing to phrases that are either nonsensical or out of context, the characters signal their acceptance of the roles they have been given.

“Gee, I’m lost!”: The Literature of Dream

The final dimension mentioned by Esslin regarding the tradition of the Theatre of the Absurd is that of the dreamlike, the mythical, and the allegorical as a means of reflecting the strangeness present in an absurd world. These aspects are hinted at in the very beginning of the play through a verse from Dante’s *Inferno*, and it serves as the “projection into concrete terms of psychological realities” (Esslin, 2004: page). It is also by appealing to this mythical sensibility that *Camino Real* manages to implement so much of the Romantic tradition into the modern absurd, finding this common ground on which the two intertwine.

As mentioned above, most research tends to tackle the romantic side of *Camino Real* by grouping its representatives together and exploring their characters in opposition to Kilroy’s. This view is, however, rather minimalist, especially when it comes to a modernist drama. A more nuanced approach could prove to be beneficial to understanding the ways in which Williams often breaches the barriers of archetypes and typologies. Thus, this paper proposes instead a hierarchy of the absurd, which aims to better explore how the playwright toys with these characters and makes them adapt to his own American limbo.

This spectrum would see Lord Byron at the top of the Romantic axis, because of his unshaken optimism and the fact that he is the only one of the main characters who actually manages to escape. The poet’s presence in the play is uncertain in the first place, since he is the only writer who gets lost in the Camino Real. Jacques

Casanova is also a historical figure, but one who has become almost a legend in popular culture, as opposed to Lord Byron.

Following the Romantic poet is the central couple of the play, Marguerite and Casanova. Their opposite needs generate a tense conflict between the two. Marguerite embodies the classic Romantic heroine who attempts to escape her condition by any means possible, whereas Casanova is the only main character who does not actually want to leave the Camino Real. Jacques is capable of accepting the absurdity of the limbo as long as Marguerite remains with him, but she is acutely aware of the meaningless of their existence and consequently that of their relationship, which can be seen in her rather cynical monologue from Block Ten, and starts as follows: “[w]hat are we sure of? Not even of our existence, dear comforting friend! And whom can we ask the questions that torment us?” (Williams, 1970: 96). Although separately they are two lost Romantics, together they form the absurd individual, who is simultaneously aware of the nonsensical world surrounding him, but who rebels against it by daring to accept it. Thus Esmeralda finds herself further on the absurdist axis than the two of them, because instead of trying to escape the Camino Real, she bends the norms and accepts the role given to her.

Kilroy’s existence is absurd in a separate way, as he is not based on a literary character or author like the rest of the cast, but on a legend, much like Italo Calvino’s Agilulf. The entire dreamlike atmosphere is built around him, as a protagonist in Don Quixote’s hallucination, which acts as a frame. This structure accounts for the cyclical tone of the play, as events jump from one to the other without a precise order and seem to lead back to the beginning, a technique which is often used in the Theatre of the Absurd. The lack of scenes and acts add to this effect, by having the characters run from one block to another, which are ultimately all the same. Characters such as Prudence warn against the power of dreams, and during the final chase Kilroy himself confesses to being overwhelmed by this world: “Gee, I’m lost! I don’t know where I am! I’m all turned around, I’m confused, I don’t understand—what’s—happened, it’s like a dream, it’s— just like a—dream . . .” (Williams, 1970: 152). Near the end, the individual surrenders his quest of trying to find any meaning, his only choices being to follow Don Quixote’s advice or to go mad.

Conclusion

Despite being often overlooked, Tennessee Williams’ *Camino Real* represents the paranoia of the McCarthy era by exploring the concept of freedom in an absurd world. This paper has explored the ways in which the play tackles absurdism, both ideologically and technically, using Martin Esslin’s *The Theatre of the Absurd* as theoretical framework. *Camino Real* is analyzed in reference to the dramatic traditions which are considered to be essential to absurdist theatre, as well as the connection between absurdism and romanticism, which are usually seen as separate in this particular work. In order to demonstrate that the play indeed fits under the umbrella

of the Theatre of the Absurd, I have chosen to approach the four relevant considerations as theorized by Esslin and investigate how they relate to the chosen case study.

Several other directions are worth being researched further. The absence of Don Juan is one of them, especially when considering how much literature has been written comparing this type of seducer to that of Jacques Casanova's. A comparative approach between Casanova's character in his original work and how Williams chooses to portray him could also prove beneficial to understanding how the meaningless of the Camino Real changes him. Similarly, a close analysis of Tennessee Williams' notion of plastic theatre and the ways in which he uses it in this work could potentially be another way in which the absurdist dimension can be explored, especially considering Antonin Artaud's influence on modern drama. Ultimately, this paper aims to better investigate an area that is seldom represented in literary criticism: that is, American absurdism and how it differs from its original counterpart.

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FEMINIST IDEALS IN TRANSITION: MARRIAGE, EQUALITY, AND AUTONOMY FROM MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT TO SYLVIA PLATH

Abstract

The purpose of the present article is to examine how the ideology of feminism inspired literary works belonging to the Romantic Period and the 20th Century. The article will compare literature from these two periods. The authors that I have chosen are Mary Wollstonecraft, Charlotte Smith and Sylvia Plath. It is well-documented that women were historically deprived of rights, and that the situation of women inspired some literary works. In this article, I will speak about the similarities and differences between the goals of women in terms of liberty and equality.

Introduction

Throughout history, patriarchal structures have had a profound influence on literature. Societal, legal and cultural norms restricted women's access to writing and publishing. They were marginalized and reduced to decorative domestic roles. This article aims to investigate the historical difficulties faced by women on their journey to becoming writers, and to highlight the similarities between their lives and the influence these had on their works. The study will focus on iconic figures such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Charlotte Smith and Sylvia Plath - women who, through their writing, became voices of female resistance in an oppressive system. From the educational and legal inequalities of the 18th century to the psychological and social repressions of the 20th century, each of these authors, in her own way, used literature as a space to question injustice, assert independence, and give shape to female experience. In doing so, they proved that writing is not just a creative act, but also a form of resistance and a path to self-empowerment in a world where women were often expected to remain silent.

The historical possibility of woman to write

Historically, women have been discouraged from engaging in written expression. The role of women in this period was to take responsibility for household chores and to care of their husbands and children. Some authors published their work under male pseudonyms, including George Eliot, the Brontë sisters, Louisa May Alcott and Elizabeth Gaskell. Others, such as Jane Austen, wrote anonymously. The subjects of this study were remunerated inadequately, subjected to derision, censure and stigmatization, and deemed to be mentally unstable. This phenomenon is exemplified in Virginia Woolf's seminal work *A Room of One's Own*. Writing was not

officially recognized as a profession open to women until the 1840s. During the Romantic period, a select group of female writers gained popularity. Charlotte Smith elected to terminate her marriage and subsequently supported herself and her children through literary composition. Following the involuntary marriage of Mary Robinson to a man against her will, she became financially independent through her writing. It was evident that Thomas Robinson feigned financial stability, yet in actuality, he pursued substantial wealth, which resulted in a considerable financial burden being placed upon his family. She is recognized as one of the inaugural celebrity writers. However, Mary Robinson encountered difficulties in her chosen career path due to her association with King George IV, who was considered a scandalous figure. She is now widely regarded as one of the most significant writers of the Romantic period.

Historically, women encountered difficulties with marriage, particularly in the matter of divorce if desired or required. The prevailing legal framework of the era stood in the way of such a course of action. Following marriage, it was extremely difficult for women to obtain a divorce. In cases where a divorce was granted, women were often subjected to social judgement and marginalization. The legal status of women was such that they were not permitted to hold property in their own names. The subjects had no autonomy. The assets and property were considered the exclusive domain of the male heir or the husband. For instance, in the event of the death of the father, the fortune was to be inherited by the next male heir, if the family comprised solely of women. The specific relation of the individual in question was of no consequence; the familial relationship was irrelevant.

Mary Wollstonecraft's life and writings

Mary Wollstonecraft, known as “The mother of women’s rights,” was an English writer who militated for women’s rights. She is especially notorious for *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and its fictional sequel *Maria; Or, The Wrongs of Woman*. Mary had a simple education. It was common that girls were not allowed to have a serious academic education. Instead, they were supposed to learn simple things which were more suitable for a girl. The boys studied more serious subjects. This issue was as well mentioned in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* by Wollstonecraft. For instance, Mary Wollstonecraft had a basic education, and she studied elementary information for certain subjects. Her brother, Ned, benefited from a serious grammar school:

Mary had her first and only formal education in Beverley. She attended a day school, where she learned simple skills of arithmetic, geography, some French, music, and dance. Ned meanwhile was sent to a more serious grammar school that had a library. Most children of the middle classes, certainly most girls, had little schooling. No one particularly expected girls to learn more than the basic education that Mary’s school provided. (Brody, 2000: 17)

Ultimately, Wollstonecraft achieved success and her contributions to history have ensured that she has remained in the historical record. She made an immense contribution for which she is notorious even in the present day; however, her brother did not, despite having received a superior education. Mary Wollstonecraft enjoyed a favorable marital situation; however, as a woman, she encountered difficulties in this patriarchal world. She was denied the opportunity to receive a proper education, and the women in her vicinity were subject to a toxic marriage, as evidenced by the case of her mother:

Edward Wollstonecraft was violent when he drank, alternately given to what Mary remembered as “fits of kindness and cruelty.” When he drank, he directed his random blows at his wife or the children. Mary, fearful for her mother’s safety, crept down the hallways at night to take up a station outside her parents’ bedroom door, ready to hurl herself between them if her father became brutal. (Brody, 2000: 21-22)

The violent behavior of her father, which was considered normal at the time, had a significant impact on the life of Mary Wollstonecraft and, concomitantly, on her writing. This phenomenon was once considered the norm within society, and regrettably, even in the present day, women continue to be susceptible to domestic violence. Although this practice is widely condemned and deemed illegal, it continues to persist:

Mary Wollstonecraft’s childhood was not happy. Her father was bad-tempered, unsteady, and drank too much. Her mother was weak-spirited and unsympathetic. Both parents doted on their eldest son, and Mary often felt ignored. To worsen this mix of storm and favoritism, the economic fortunes of the Wollstonecrafts, though they began well, declined continually through the years of Mary’s childhood, mostly through her careless father’s steady mismanagement. (Brody, 2000: 9)

In *Maria; Or, The Wrongs of Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft highlighted the injustice and the oppressive societal structures that limit women's freedom. Maria's story is about self-determination. She was forced to marry George Venables, who turned out to be abusive and manipulative. This reflects how women were the victims of the medical and legal systems. The fact that she did not consent is a key aspect of Wollstonecraft’s feminist critique. The novel illustrates how women in 18th-century England were often deprived of autonomy and forced to submit to men's will, both legally and socially:

she had been married, against her inclination, to a rich old man, extremely jealous (no wonder, for she was a charming creature); and that, in consequence of his treatment, or something which hung on her mind, she had, during her first lying-in, lost her senses. (Wollstonecraft, 1798)

Even though Maria's attempts to escape from the unfortunate marriage were challenged by legal and social obstacles, she finally managed to obtain her independence. She created a life outside marriage for herself and her child. Maria's intellectual development reflects feminist ideals, as it shows that women are capable of rational thinking and deserve the same opportunities as men. Wollstonecraft uses Maria's path to advocate for women's rights, such as the right to get divorced and to have control over their own properties.

Wollstonecraft, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, portrays the same ideals. Women should be considered rational human beings, and their virtues, such as truth and fortitude, should be comparable, sharing the same principles. She proposes that to achieve gender equality, boys and girls should be educated in this direction. She suggests a curriculum encompassing reading, writing, arithmetic, natural history, and elements of religion, history, and politics. Furthermore, she emphasizes the importance of gymnastic play in the open air. The reality of this period was that boys and girls had a different education. Boys were taught general subjects and were allowed to develop intellectually, but girls were educated to take care of the children and house chores:

from Rousseau to Dr Gregory, have contributed to render women more artificial, weak characters, than they would otherwise have been; and consequently, more useless members of society. I might have expressed this conviction in a lower key, but I am afraid it would have been the whine of affectation, and not the faithful expression of my feelings, of the clear result which experience and reflection have led me to draw. (Wollstonecraft, 1792: 13)

Charlotte Smith's life and poetry

Charlotte Smith is one of the most important writers of the Romantic period. In a world where literature was dominated by men, she was incredibly successful, and she is appreciated even nowadays. Charlotte Smith's marriage with Benjamin Smith was the source of a profound suffering that influenced the emotional intensity of her writing. She was the victim of an arranged marriage at the age of fifteen, with a man who was part of her father's businesses.

Charlotte was married to Benjamin Smith, a partner in her father's business, on 23 February 1765, when she was fifteen. She said later that she was 'sacrificed' by her father to secure a commercial alliance, and that her marriage was a 'ruinous bargain' (Fletcher, 1998: 32)

The stability of the marriage quickly deteriorated, as Charlotte was the victim of domestic violence. She had to endure all of her husband's anger issues and his lack of financial responsibility. Benjamin's irresponsible behavior led him to jail for his debts. Charlotte was forced to live with her children in King's Bench Prison. This

episode of humiliation and deprivation demonstrates not only the lack of marital support but also the legal constraints imposed on married women at the time. Physical and economic suffering was compounded by profound intellectual isolation. Her husband showed no interest in her literary talent or her intellectual pursuits, which led Charlotte to seek refuge in reading and writing. Although divorce was legally impossible, she managed, after years of hardship, to separate from her husband and support her family solely from the income from her writing, breaking the social and legal norms of the time: "Eventually, after years of hardship, she succeeded in separating from Benjamin, although divorce was not available" (Fletcher, 1998: 70).

Charlotte Smith's poetry explores a wide range of themes, including nature, love, and feminism. One of her most powerful and thought-provoking poems is "Sonnet XLIV: Written in the Church-Yard at Middleton in Sussex," which reflects on the historical oppression of women. The sonnet expresses a persistent and deep lyrical voice, characterized by impotence in the face of unbridled nature and fate. It reflects the profound feminine experience of a woman who is sensitive, marginalized, and marked by emotional and social difficulties.

In most of her sonnets, Charlotte Smith projects a sensibility associated with femininity, one which feels and suffers acutely in the face of injustice and instability. This suffering is often coupled with powerlessness in relation to the outside world, a recurring condition in women's lives in 18th-century society, when their freedom was restricted in both public and family life.

The images of nature, the invading sea, the strong winds, and the shattered tombs can be interpreted as symbols of societal or patriarchal forces that crush female existence. The fact that death brings quietness, a "gloomy rest," while life is "a long storm," implies that the experience of life, for women, is a form of continuous suffering. The woman is thus alive not to live, but to survive. The location of the poem, the cemetery, becomes a poetical space and a meditation on the human condition. In the feminist context, it can be interpreted as a symbol of women's invisibility. Once dead, women become part of an eroded landscape, the remains of which are washed away by waves and oblivion. Thus, Smith suggests that society easily forgets women's contribution and suffering, even after death. Although the sonnet seems to focus on nature and existential meditation, underneath the sonnet one can also read a critique of the social order that condemns women to silence and marginalization. Instead of hope or religious resignation, as expected from women writers of the era, Smith expresses a somber desire to join the dead, which was a radical, even subversive attitude for a woman of the Georgian era.

Sylvia Plath's life, *The Bell Jar* and her poetry

Sylvia Plath is one of the most famous writers of the 20th century. Although she predominantly wrote poetry, one of her most notable works is the novel *The Bell Jar*.

It portrays the expectations of patriarchal society, which dictates that women should marry, raise children, do housework, and perhaps have a job that is considered suitable for women, or not work at all. The protagonist, Esther Greenwood, was encouraged by her mother to pursue a career in stenography instead of becoming a writer. Esther Greenwood broke the norms of patriarchal society; she was a woman who found herself trapped by the opportunities available to her. She was expected to get married quickly after university and embrace traditional values. She almost found herself in an unsuitable marriage.

Esther Greenwood was suicidal; she is reminiscent of Sylvia Plath during her time at university, and the novel is semi-biographical. She also portrays women from the first half of the 20th century. Unlike in the Romantic period after World War II, women were permitted to own property and work; however, they were not encouraged to pursue a career. During the war, women were useful in so-called men's jobs, and they did a great job. However, after the war ended, they were replaced by men. Women were not encouraged to be independent, as they had to be submissive and maintain a household in accordance with traditional values. Men were the breadwinners, while women were responsible for childcare, cleaning and cooking. This is how they were portrayed by the media and encouraged by society. Pursuing a career was considered outrageous and useless by society because men earned higher salaries and could support an entire family.

Plath's life, emotions, mental health, marriage and certain social situations, such as gender inequality, impacted her literature. I would particularly like to emphasize the influence this had on her poetry. Her marriage to Ted Hughes was unhappy. He was abusive and unfaithful. Sadly, after struggling with depression and an unhappy life, Sylvia Plath took her own life in poverty. It is known that she completed her novel, *The Bell Jar*, and wrote a volume of poetry, *Ariel*, containing some of her most important poems, such as "Ariel," "Tulip," "Lady Lazarus," "Edge" and "Daddy," in the period before her death. Sylvia Plath's poetry approaches a plethora of themes, such as mental illness in "Tulips," female identity in "The Applicant," suicide in "Lady Lazarus," motherhood in "Morning Song," identity crisis in "Edge," and self-destruction in "Ariel".

In "Edge," Sylvia Plath portrays a woman who achieved every sense of peace, but the poem is also about her journey in a world where society expects a woman to fit into the norms. They are not seen as individual human beings who can live independently. A woman should get married and depend on her husband and she has to take care of him and the household, as women are valued only as mothers, lovers and performers of societal norms. A woman is cherished for her body, "The woman is perfected / Her dead / Body wears the smile of accomplishment, / The illusion of a Greek necessity," (Plath, 1965b) and not for whom she is. At the same time, she is already used to it: "The moon has nothing to be sad about, / Staring from her hood of bone. / She is used to this sort of thing. / Her blacks crackle and drag" (Plath, 1965b).

In "Daddy," the author portrays her father as a patriarchal symbol. He is the figure that scared her and who has control over her: "I have always been scared of you, / With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygook" (Plath, 1965a). Her father is considered authoritarian and he is associated with the Nazi regime. As in the other poems, she is feeling oppressed and she has the role of the submissive daughter: "I was ten when they buried you. / At twenty I tried to die / And get back, back, back to you. / I thought even the bones would do" (Plath, 1965a). This excerpt shows that she does not have autonomy over her body. She is emotionally dependent on the father figure, and she feels that it is her moral duty to follow him.

The poem "Elm" is one of the most complex explorations of female grief in Sylvia Plath's poetry. In an allegorical and confessional register, the poetic voice speaks from the perspective of an elm, a personified female tree which becomes a symbol of the uprooted self, of traumatic memory and of a body scarred by violence. At the centre of the poem is a voice which strongly says: "I know the bottom, she says. I know it with my great tap root: / It is what you fear. / I do not fear it: I have been there" (Plath, 1965c). This identification of the 'tree' with an experienced female voice that has reached the 'bottom' of grief marks a reversal of the passivity traditionally associated with women in poetry. The female subject in "Elm" is not the romantic victim, but an intense and lucid observer of her own brokenness. Through her roots, she penetrates deep into the personal and collective subconscious of female suffering.

The poem ironizes the ideals of love and emotional balance often associated with the domesticated feminine: "Love is a shadow. / How you lie and cry after it" (Plath, 1965c). In this phrasing, Plath deconstructs the myth of romantic love, seen here as a deceptive shadow and suggests that the modern woman is a prisoner of full promises that, once betrayed, generate psychological violence. Although the poem is spoken in the first person, the poetic voice in "Elm" is unstable, at times omniscient, at others fractured, shifting from impersonal observations to intimate confessions. This polyphony reflects the way in which female identity is dismantled and reconstructed in the context of a world that looks in from the outside. But the lyric voice does not yield, it reclaims the space of pain and transforms it into poetry into aesthetic resistance.

Conclusion

This study explores the historical condition of women in relation to writing and artistic expression, highlighting the many social, legal and cultural obstacles that women have faced over time. From the Romantic period to the 20th century, women have been systematically marginalized, discouraged from writing, deprived of equal formal education, and deprived of legal and economic autonomy. The female figures under scrutiny in this study demonstrate that writing was not only an artistic act, but also one of revolt, liberation and survival.

Writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Charlotte Smith and Sylvia Plath defied the norms of the time, and their works are a powerful testament to resistance and the ongoing struggle for the right to express yourself and be independent. Mary Wollstonecraft is one of the most important people in the history of feminism. She strongly believed that women should have the same rights as men and the same opportunities in education. Charlotte Smith had a difficult marriage and a lot of money problems. But she was able to support her family by writing books. She wrote about her personal life in a very sensitive way. In the 20th century, Sylvia Plath used her writing to express the experiences of women. She wrote about difficult topics such as depression, motherhood and the oppression of women by men. Her writing is personal and honest, and it shows that she was not afraid to speak up about the things that mattered to her.

By writing, these women authors have found their own voices and shown other women that you can be strong and honest in a world that often wants you to stay hidden. Literature provided a medium through which individuals could articulate their concerns and engage in resistance against the prevailing societal silence. Consequently, the history of women's writing is not solely the history of a cultural act, but also of a struggle for recognition, autonomy and dignity.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF VERA BRITAIN'S *TESTAMENT OF YOUTH* ON ENGLISH WAR NOVELS

Abstract

The study will focus on Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* and its importance in the field of war memoirs and historical account about the youth in Britain during World War I. Vera Brittain's memoir is a powerful exploration of war's impact on personal identity and emotional resilience. Through her firsthand account of World War I, Brittain portrays the shattering loss of an entire generation. The memoir captures the transformation from youthful idealism to profound disillusionment, illustrating how war erodes not only lives but also dreams. Brittain's introspective narrative serves as both a historical record and a personal meditation on grief, survival, and the struggle to rebuild meaning after devastation. Her work remains a vital literary testament to the enduring scars of war.

Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth*, first published in 1933, stands as one of the most enduring literary works to emerge from the shadow of the First World War. Part memoir, part historical document, and part philosophical reflection, the work captures the voice of a young generation—what Brittain refers to as “the lost generation,” whose youth was stolen by global conflict. In the early 20th century, literature concerning the Great War was largely male dominated, reflecting the direct experiences of soldiers in the trenches. Brittain's contribution broke that mold. Her memoir offered a civilian and, more importantly, a female perspective on the conflict—a viewpoint that had been largely absent or overlooked in contemporary and later literary accounts.

More than simply a war memoir, Brittain's work offers an incisive critique of pre-war social conventions and gender expectations. As a woman who broke away from the traditional role of a sheltered daughter to become a nurse and later an intellectual and pacifist, Brittain's journey is emblematic of the changing role of women in the early 20th century. Her writing is deeply introspective, eloquent, and filled with raw emotion, characteristics that set her apart not only from her contemporaries but also from many writers in the canon of war literature.

This paper will examine the historical, literary, and feminist significance of *Testament of Youth*, situating Brittain's work within the broader context of English war novels and memoirs. The study will focus on how her unique narrative voice, thematic concerns, and lived experiences helped redefine the genre of war literature and contributed to a greater understanding of the personal and societal costs of war. In doing so, this work will also address how her legacy continues to influence literature, history, and gender studies today.

The outbreak of World War I in 1914 brought with it not only unprecedented violence but also profound cultural and societal shifts. One of the most significant transformations occurred in the realm of gender roles. As millions of men were conscripted and sent to the front, women stepped into roles: working in munitions factories, driving ambulances, managing farms, and most notably, serving as nurses and volunteers close to the front lines. This mass mobilization of women disrupted Victorian ideals of femininity and domesticity, sparking a re-evaluation of what it meant to be a woman in modern Britain. This seismic change found its way into the literary world, altering both the subjects and authorship of war-related literature. Prior to the First World War, the bulk of English war writing focused on heroism, imperial conquest, and patriotic sacrifice—largely written by and for men. However, the stark realities of mechanized warfare, trench conditions, and mass death rendered earlier romanticized depictions of war obsolete. Poets like Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon responded with graphic, bitter accounts of the front. Yet even these influential voices largely centered male combat experience.

In this environment, women's voices, those of mothers, sisters, lovers, and female volunteers, were often marginalized or viewed as peripheral to the central "male" narrative of the war. Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* disrupted this pattern. By offering a vivid and intelligent portrayal of a woman's direct and indirect experiences with war, Brittain challenged the assumption that meaningful war literature had to emerge from the trenches. Her work insisted that emotional labor, caregiving, and civilian grief were equally significant aspects of the wartime experience.

In literary terms, *Testament of Youth* helped to expand the definition of war literature. It invited readers to consider the psychological and social consequences of war beyond the battlefield and made space for narratives of caregiving, emotional devastation, and the enduring strength of women. In doing so, Brittain not only recorded history, she helped to reshape its telling.

Understanding the significance of *Testament of Youth* requires an appreciation of the life that shaped it. Vera Mary Brittain was born on December 29, 1893, in Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire, and grew up in the conservative and class-conscious world of Edwardian England. The daughter of a prosperous paper manufacturer, she was expected to follow the traditional path laid out for upper-middle-class women: marriage, motherhood, and domesticity. But Brittain was never content with such limitations. From an early age, she demonstrated a fierce intellectual ambition and a desire for independence, traits that would later define her writing and activism.

In 1914, after considerable resistance from her family, Brittain won a place at Somerville College, Oxford, to study English Literature. Her acceptance into this prestigious institution was a victory not just for herself but for the broader cause of women's education. However, her academic career was soon interrupted by the outbreak of World War I. Like many young people of her generation, Brittain was

swept up in a wave of patriotic fervor and emotional urgency. Her fiancé, Roland Leighton, along with her brother Edward and close friends Victor Richardson and Geoffrey Thurlow, enlisted to fight in France. Rather than remain a passive observer, Brittain chose to act. In 1915, she left Oxford to serve as a Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) nurse with the British Red Cross. Her work took her to various locations, including London, Malta, and eventually the Western Front. During her time as a nurse, Brittain witnessed the physical horrors of war firsthand and developed a profound empathy for the young men who were being sacrificed in the name of national honor. This period was transformative. It not only deepened her emotional maturity but also shaped her understanding of the war's broader human cost. The war brought devastating personal losses. Roland Leighton was killed in action in 1915. Geoffrey Thurlow and Victor Richardson died not long afterward, and Edward Brittain, her beloved younger brother, was killed in Italy in 1918. Each death left a permanent scar on her psyche and contributed to the emotional intensity of her later writing. In *Testament of Youth*, these events are not recounted clinically or from a distance, they are relived with raw vulnerability and a keen sense of injustice. After the war, Brittain returned to Oxford to complete her studies, this time focusing on history rather than literature. The change in subject reflected a deeper transformation in her worldview—from idealism to a more grounded, critical understanding of the world and its institutions. It was during this period that she began to write in earnest, publishing poetry, essays, and eventually her magnum opus, *Testament of Youth*.

Published in 1933, the memoir was the result of nearly a decade of introspection, research, and literary labor. Brittain meticulously revisited her personal letters, journals, and war experiences to craft a narrative that was both intimate and historically resonant. The decision to write a memoir rather than a novel was significant: she wanted her story to be recognized as fact, not fiction. She wanted her grief, her anger, and her resilience to be acknowledged not just as emotional responses but as testimony—evidence of a generation's suffering. *Testament of Youth* thus emerged as both a personal catharsis and a public document. It stands as a powerful example of how individual lives are woven into the fabric of history, and how literature can serve as both witness and indictment.

The memoir is rich in thematic complexity, weaving together personal, political, and philosophical reflections that make the memoir both emotionally impactful and intellectually provocative. The themes Brittain explores are not confined to her individual experiences but reflect the collective trauma of a generation devastated by war. Her work transcends the genre of autobiography to become a meditation on the human cost of conflict, the shifting identities of women, and the struggle to rebuild meaning from the wreckage of loss.

Disillusionment is perhaps the memoir's most prominent and persistent theme. Brittain begins her journey filled with enthusiasm and idealism. Like many of her contemporaries, she initially views the war as an honorable cause and supports her fiancé and brother in their decision to enlist. But as the war drags on and the

casualties mount, her faith in its nobility disintegrates. Each death she endures pulls her further away from the patriotic narrative that dominated the early war years. She comes to see the war not as a just struggle but as a pointless slaughter that wastes human potential and mocks the values it purports to defend. Her growing pacifism is not born of political theory but of lived experience, and this transformation is chronicled with harrowing clarity.

Closely tied to this is the theme of grief and memory. Brittain does not present mourning as a single moment of sadness but as a lifelong engagement with absence. Her loss is not neatly resolved or compartmentalized. Instead, grief becomes a companion that shapes her relationships, her ambitions, and her view of the world. Her reflections on grief are unflinchingly honest. She allows readers to witness her despair, her anger, her numbness, and her attempts to make sense of the senselessness. The grief she expresses is also inherently political; by sharing it publicly, she challenges the silence and stoicism often expected of women in mourning and insists that personal loss is part of the historical record.

Another key theme is resilience. While *Testament of Youth* is undeniably a chronicle of suffering, it is also a testament to human endurance. Brittain does not succumb to bitterness or nihilism. Instead, she channels her pain into activism, intellectual pursuit, and literary creation. Her resilience is not triumphant in the traditional sense, she does not “overcome” her grief in a linear or final way, it is real and hard-earned. It is expressed through her return to Oxford, her commitment to pacifism, and her decision to write the very memoir that exposes her deepest vulnerabilities.

Feminism also runs through the narrative, both explicitly and implicitly. Brittain’s very act of telling her story defies the conventions of her time. Women were expected to support the war quietly, to mourn in private, and to resume their domestic roles once the conflict ended. Brittain refuses this script. She uses her memoir to claim intellectual and moral authority, presenting her perspective not as supplementary to the male war experience but as central to understanding the true cost of war. She also reflects on the limitations imposed on women, particularly in academia and public life, and how the war both reinforced and disrupted those boundaries. Her nursing work is depicted not just as service, but as a crucible that reshaped her identity and equipped her to speak with moral clarity.

Finally, there is the theme of generational loss. Brittain writes not only for herself but for the many young men and women whose futures were erased by war. Her memoir becomes a voice for the silenced, a testimony for those who, like her, were left to pick up the fragments of a world that no longer made sense. In giving narrative shape to her experiences, she preserves not only her own story but the memory of a generation caught in history’s deadliest machinery.

These themes interact dynamically throughout the work, giving it its enduring relevance and ensure that Brittain’s voice, once solitary in its sorrow, continues to

resonate with readers facing their own reckonings with loss, identity, and the meaning of history.

Another striking feature of *Testament of Youth* is Vera Brittain's use of narrative voice. The power of her memoir does not stem solely from its content, the tragic losses, the vivid war scenes, the social commentary, but from the way she tells her story. Brittain's voice is intimate, reflective, and fiercely intelligent. Her narrative technique elevates the memoir beyond personal recollection into a work of significant literary and historical merit. The voice she crafts allows readers to engage deeply with both the emotional intensity of her experience and the intellectual framework she applies to interpret it.

Brittain's decision to write a memoir, as opposed to a novel or other fictionalized account, was a deliberate act of truth-telling. By doing so, she affirmed the importance of her lived experiences and placed them within the public record. The memoir form allows her to blend subjective emotion with historical analysis, creating a multifaceted work that is both testimonial and interpretive. Her use of personal letters, diary entries, and reconstructed dialogue gives the memoir a layered texture, simultaneously immersive and analytical.

Her voice is characterized by a careful balance between emotional transparency and narrative control. She allows the reader to witness her most intimate moments of sorrow, fear, and confusion, yet these are never presented as raw or disorganized outbursts. Instead, Brittain reflects on her emotions with clarity and maturity, offering insight into how grief and trauma evolve over time. This reflective distance, made possible by the decade that passed between the war and the memoir's publication, lends the narrative a unique depth. Brittain is both participant and historian of her own life. There is also a notable evolution in the voice as the memoir progresses. In the early chapters, Brittain's writing is tinged with youthful optimism and a desire to break free from the constraints of provincial life. Her excitement about Oxford, her romantic idealism, and her admiration for Roland Leighton come across with energy and vividness. As the war encroaches on her world and death becomes a repeated reality, her voice matures, adopting a tone of grave sobriety and moral urgency. By the memoir's end, Brittain is no longer a hopeful student but a seasoned chronicler of loss and change.

Brittain's style is also marked by intellectual rigor. She does not simply recount events, she analyzes them. Her memoir is filled with commentary on the broader social, political, and ethical implications of what she experienced. For example, she reflects critically on the propaganda that fueled enlistment, the limited options available to women, and the futility of revenge or glorification of sacrifice. This analytical voice aligns her with contemporaries like Virginia Woolf, who also sought to dissect the psychological underpinnings of society in flux.

Brittain's prose is elegant without being ornate, emotional without being sentimental. She employs metaphor, irony, and allusion to enrich her storytelling, yet never loses the immediacy of her voice. The memoir's pacing is deliberate,

allowing the reader to sit with each event and its emotional resonance. Her scenes of nursing wounded soldiers, for instance, are not merely descriptive; they are imbued with a quiet, devastating dignity that heightens their impact.

The memoir form also enables Brittain to position herself as both subject and interpreter. She does not present her story as unique, but rather as emblematic of a wider tragedy. By including letters from Roland, Edward, and others, she shares the stage with the voices of the dead, allowing them to speak through her text. This technique creates a collective narrative, underscoring the memoir's function as a memorial as much as a confession.

While *Testament of Youth* is first and foremost a war memoir, it is equally a profound work of feminist literature. Vera Brittain's account of her experiences during and after the First World War is deeply embedded in her critique of gender roles, social expectations, and the marginalization of women's voices. The memoir not only documents her personal transformation from obedient daughter to independent thinker but also reflects a broader ideological shift toward the empowerment of women in early 20th-century Britain. At a time when women were still fighting for the right to vote and were largely excluded from political and intellectual life, Brittain's decision to publish such a deeply personal and socially critical memoir was radical. Her insistence that the emotional labor of women was as worthy of historical record as the battlefield exploits of men challenged prevailing notions of what constituted a valid war narrative. By centering her story on her own experiences and emotions, she disrupted a literary tradition that had long marginalized female perspectives.

Brittain's feminism is grounded in experience rather than abstract ideology. She does not deliver polemics; rather, she shows how societal structures limited her choices and shaped her suffering. Her entry into Somerville College at Oxford, against the wishes of her father and the expectations of her class, marks the beginning of her rebellion against the constraints imposed on women. Her memoir details the struggles she faced as a woman attempting to pursue higher education in a male-dominated environment. Even in war service, where she worked tirelessly as a VAD nurse, Brittain faced belittlement and was often expected to suppress her intellect and opinions in deference to male authority.

A recurring feminist theme in *Testament of Youth* is the idea of women as secondary participants in history. Brittain exposes how women were often expected to remain silent and stoic in the face of loss, their grief overshadowed by the perceived heroism of the men who died. She challenges this notion by vocalizing her own pain and by portraying the psychological toll of the war on women as equally profound. In doing so, she elevates the status of female emotional labor, showing that the suffering of those who survive is not less than that of those who perish, it is simply different. Moreover, Brittain refuses to romanticize the role of women as mourners or caregivers. She describes the exhaustion, the emotional numbness, and the growing disillusionment she experienced while tending to the wounded. These

depictions undercut traditional images of the selfless, angelic nurse and replace them with a more honest portrayal of a woman forced to bear the unbearable, day after day. In this realism, Brittain affirms the emotional complexity of women and their capacity for moral and intellectual autonomy.

The feminist aspect of *Testament of Youth* also extends to Brittain's post-war activism. After the war, she became a vocal advocate for pacifism, women's rights, and international cooperation. She was an active member of the League of Nations Union and later the Peace Pledge Union, promoting nonviolent solutions to international conflict. These commitments were not separate from her feminism, they were extensions of it. Brittain believed that the undervaluation of women's voices and the glamorization of violence were interconnected problems. By promoting peace and advocating for the inclusion of women in public life, she worked to dismantle the very ideologies that had fueled the war and prolonged its suffering.

In writing *Testament of Youth*, Vera Brittain made a feminist intervention into the historical and literary canon. She refused to allow her experience and many others to be dismissed or forgotten. Her memoir asserts that women's stories are integral to understanding the true nature of war and that grief, resilience, and thought are not gendered qualities but human ones. In this sense, Brittain not only told her own story — she helped open the door for generations of women to tell theirs.

In the rich tapestry of First World War literature, Vera Brittain's novel holds a unique and essential place. While the dominant literary responses to the war have historically been male-authored, most notably by poets such as Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, and novelists like Erich Maria Remarque and Robert Graves, Brittain's memoir diverges not only in gender but in tone, scope, and purpose. Her work expands the boundaries of war literature by chronicling the experiences of those outside the trenches and challenging the assumption that true suffering and heroism are confined to the battlefield.

Many canonical works from this period focus on the visceral horror of trench warfare. Wilfred Owen's poetry, for example, graphically describes the mutilation, fear, and senselessness of combat. His famous poem "Dulce et Decorum Est" deconstructs the romantic ideals of patriotism, exposing the physical degradation of soldiers and the emotional toll of violence. Siegfried Sassoon, similarly, mixes biting satire with bitter realism, attacking the institutions and ideologies that glorify war. These male-authored texts often center on the disillusionment and alienation experienced by soldiers, creating a collective image of trauma endured in uniform. Brittain's narrative, by contrast, captures a different but no less harrowing form of trauma: that of watching the war unfold from the margins and suffering its consequences without being empowered to fight or protest effectively. Her pain is quieter, less explosive, but more prolonged. She loses nearly everyone she loves not in a sudden mass casualty, but one by one, in a slow dismantling of her personal world. This loss is compounded by a profound sense of helplessness. Brittain, like so

many women, was not given a direct role in decision-making or military engagement, yet she bore the emotional aftermath as acutely as any soldier.

Where male writers often employ terse, fragmented prose to capture the immediacy of war, Brittain uses a more reflective and layered narrative style. Her memoir is not episodic but cumulative, building emotional weight over hundreds of pages. This slow burn of grief and awakening gives *Testament of Youth* its power. It invites the reader not just to witness suffering, but to reflect on it, to think about its causes and its consequences beyond the battlefield. The memoir does not end with the war's conclusion; instead, it examines how trauma persists in peace. Her post-war chapters deal with emptiness, confusion, and the difficulty of finding meaning, a sentiment echoed in later existential literature.

The cultural and historical impact of *Testament of Youth* extends far beyond its literary merit. Since its publication in 1933, Vera Brittain's memoir has become a cornerstone in the collective memory of the First World War, offering a uniquely powerful account of how the war shaped a generation, not only in terms of death and destruction but in the profound transformation of identities, values, and societal structures. Brittain's narrative resonated with readers because it articulated a shared trauma and moral reckoning that many felt but had not yet seen expressed with such clarity and compassion. Upon its release, *Testament of Youth* struck a chord in post-war Britain. It gave voice to the disillusionment felt by many who had witnessed the promises of pre-war society crumble in the face of mechanized slaughter. The memoir was both a personal story and a social document, shedding light on the often-ignored experiences of women during wartime. In a culture still dominated by military triumphalism and stoic narratives of sacrifice, Brittain's candid portrayal of emotional devastation and moral outrage offered a necessary counterbalance. Her willingness to grieve publicly, to name the loss, and to question its purpose helped initiate a broader cultural re-examination of the war's meaning. In education, the memoir has been widely adopted in university curricula across literature, history, and gender studies departments. Its blend of literary sophistication and historical insight makes it a valuable teaching tool. Students reading the text encounter not just a personal story, but a complex portrait of a society in transition—from rigid Edwardian norms to the fragmented modernity of the post-war world. Culturally, *Testament of Youth* has inspired generations of readers to consider the ethical dimensions of war, memory, and storytelling. It invites readers to view history not as a sequence of battles and treaties, but as a series of personal losses and moral choices. Brittain's work humanizes the statistics of war, reminding us that behind every number is a network of relationships.

Vera Brittain's work is not simply a memoir, it is a landmark in literature, a cultural artifact, and a moral document. Through her honest, unflinching recounting of personal loss and emotional devastation, Brittain captured the trauma of an entire generation. Her work stands apart from other war narratives not only because of her gender but because of her insistence on centering the emotional and psychological

consequences of conflict, both during and long after the guns fell silent. In doing so, she helped redefine the boundaries of war literature and asserted the validity of female voices in recounting the most harrowing events of the 20th century.

Brittain's memoir continues to serve as a foundational text in multiple disciplines. Historians draw on it to understand civilian life during wartime; literary scholars analyze it as a masterclass in memoir writing and narrative structure; feminist critics regard it as a key text in the documentation of women's intellectual and emotional lives. In classrooms, libraries, and film adaptations, her voice lives on, continuing to challenge and inspire.

Perhaps most importantly, *Testament of Youth* has given future generations a vocabulary for speaking about grief and endurance. It has shown that mourning can be a political act, that personal memory is a form of resistance, and that literature has the power to transcend individual experience and touch the collective conscience.

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REWRITING THE DYSTOPIAN NIGHTMARE *JULIA* AS A FEMINIST REINTERPRETATION OF *1984*

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to investigate the depiction of gender and sexuality as means of constructing a fictive heterosexual matrix in *Julia*. Through feminist lenses, the analysis focuses on the nonconformity of the characters in terms of performance of masculinity and femininity, as well as the practice of homosexuality within a supposedly heterosexual diegesis. Strating from the departure of femininity and masculinity in *1984*, *Julia* assimilates and overthrows the notion of sexuality and gender by creating a largely fictive representation of heterosexuality and stereotypical gender norms within a spectrum of a practicing bisexuality or homosexuality.

Ever since *1984* was published, there has been an ongoing interest over its restricted representation of women. The portrayal of a woman's life in *1984* may not be considered extremely elaborate but rather one-sided due to a reason. Winston Smith, the main character and protagonist, cannot provide a detailed account to how women live in the universe of *1984* because of his limited perception of them, and that severely impacts the overall portrayal of women. They stand for a system of binaries that is divided into two classifications: one woman adheres to the regime's law, like Winston Smith's wife, whereas the other does not. The difference between these two women represents one of the gaps some people believed would never be addressed.

As a result, in our contemporary age, many rewritings occur to address different issues. Some may parody earlier works of literature, while others may try to offer a broader perspective on aspects that have not been thoroughly analyzed. That seems to be the case in *Julia* (2023) by Sandra Newman. Through the use of intertextuality, this novel tries to convey a distinct perspective on the treatment of women that has not been carefully examined by Orwell in *1984*. The use of intertextuality, according to which a story has a "multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash." (Barthes, 1977: 146), refers to the fact that a book has at least one source from which it derives its writings. No writing appears to be without influence; all pieces of writing may, or are, influenced by one another.

Julia, therefore, becomes a feminist reinterpretation of *1984* so that it may address several problems that *1984* did not do as such: how does a woman live under such a totalitarian regime? What if she decides that she can disengage with the regime's laws and not get caught? *1984* cannot fully respond to these questions; *Julia* (2023) can. As a piece of feminist work, it not only discusses performative sexuality

and gender, but it also portrays an unusual turn from heterosexuality to other sexualities as means to cope with the strict legal code that a totalitarian regime has created. *Julia* has an established system of heterosexuality—a heterosexual matrix like Julia Butler prefers to call it—but looking beyond the apparent mask of heterosexuality, there is more to analyze than it appears at first sight.

The heterosexual matrix that is constructed, according to Judith Butler, depicts a “hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender” (2002: 194) that, under the commonly practiced heterosexual relation, reflects a “masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female” (idem.) oppositional and hierarchical behavior between men and women. In *1984*, the heterosexual matrix appears to be well defined because of the regime’s imposed type of relations between people, even though Julia’s promiscuity is present; in *Julia*, promiscuity is an intrinsic part of her personality; is not entirely a form of resistance to the regime, but rather a habitual practice that reveals a fictive act of heterosexuality within the norm of practicing bisexuality or homosexuality. Masculinity and femininity as performances become blurred and are not always presented as opposites in most characters.

Julia, therefore, constitutes an intertextual piece of fiction that challenges the heterosexual matrix and its practices that are displayed in *1984*. It represents a departure by incorporating core notions of *1984* and then subverting them through the image of collective repression of sexuality and gender that is seen through Julia as a narrator. Through an imbalanced performance of gender, characters find themselves unable to accomplish the laws of a heterosexual matrix, therefore disrupting the apparent heterosexual norm and typical conventions that occur in an oppositional dichotomy of masculine versus feminine.

The Performance of Gender in *Julia*

Gender, according to Judith Butler, is “the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance” (2002: 43). In other words, gender is performative and through repeated actions it becomes a constructed, well-defined performance. In *Julia*, the performance of gender is not fully binary, cannot always affirm a strict male authority over the female due to the peculiar circumstances that Julia enacts and witnesses. The paradigm shifts at micro level in terms of ordinary relationships between men and women whenever the Outer Party people are concerned. Of course, the balance between men and women remains, to a certain extent, similar to an oppositional and hierarchical one whenever men with authority are involved. Men who possess a higher degree of authority may impose themselves on women because of the power that resides with their position and status. In comparison with the interaction that Julia has with other characters, it suggests that Outer Party men, or Proles, may not enact a masculinity equivalent to their Inner

Party counterpart. Men with authority may impose their viewpoints or decisions on women, but the interaction that occurs in ordinary relationships that involve Proles may change the performance of gender immensely.

Femininity and Gender Performativity in Female Characters

In 1984, there were two approaches to how gender is performed when it came to women, and this dichotomy is not complex in its nature; it is oppositional and typical. Winston's wife represents the ideal Party woman, whereas Julia remains Winston's Eve (Beauchamp, 2004: 45). In *Julia*, though the performance of masculinity and femininity is defined as oppositional, the behavior between men and women changes to the extent that there is either a blend of characteristics or is entirely redirected from one to the other. The performance of femininity or masculinity now relies on the situation and position of authority that each character occupies.

The performance of gender is almost exclusively enacted in the presence of the telescreens, more respectively being forced to perform in front of them. As the characters know that they are watched, their perception of their actions changes and they are obliged to respect the laws enforced by the regime: "Julia felt her own cruelty. But it was how she must be – for the telescreens, for the other girls listening in the dark" (Newman, 2023: 46). The performance must be authentic, believable. "If there is a male comrade on duty, I'd ask you to avert your eyes" (Newman, 2023: 32). Considering Julia's promiscuous nature, the comment is purely a performative act meant to fit within the regime's standards for women. The emotions of shame and embarrassment that would be expected in such situation are either unimaginable or nonexistent, as Julia's morality is devoid of any feelings of discomfort and is inherently opposed to the regime's laws.

As a typically accepted behavior, the performance is not highly different to 1984 in terms of conduct; the ideal woman portrayed by Winston's wife remains the same absolute standard, although the conditions of forming a marriage no longer exists for Proles. Through their educational system, we may observe what women are taught: "cookery, and real food was provided for this purpose" (Newman, 2023: 55), therefore enhancing submissive or 'feminine' attitudes that women must perform. However, the enactment of the imbalanced gender does not affect how people choose their jobs, nor inflict any damage against the Party. The Party itself inflicts damage on characters who are nonconforming to the established standard behavior.

The concept of femininity, defined as "femininity is artificially defined by customs and fashion, it is imposed on every woman from the outside" (de Beauvoir, 2011: 740), is reflected through accepted behavior and several incidents that show weakness in women or noncompliant way of acting. For example, we may observe a departure at a young age, even though what is imposed by the Party changes slightly (Newman, 2023: 54). Through SAZ, we may observe what women are taught apart

from men: cooking (idem). However, the enactment of gender does not imply that women ought to choose their jobs according to their femininity, nor can it prevent them from having one. Julia and other characters, such as Essie, perform a 'manly' job, such as working as mechanics. Their use of femininity relies, at least at a performative level, on a normative façade that very rarely intervenes with their work for the regime.

The actual performance of heterosexual matrix remains a possibility only for women coming from the Inner Party; hence, it is based on class. By being based on class, the differences between men and women, married people and unmarried people reinforce the change in the behavior and performance of gender only at the level of the Proles and other Outer Party members. Prole women are considered inferior to Inner Party women: "Prole women [...] weren't welcome here. They could not be pure" (2023: 197). Yet, being married to an Inner Party man does not guarantee safety either: „I've hardly met a man at Central Committee with a wife of more than thirty [...]. As soon as the wife starts to lose her looks, the wife becomes a thought criminal" (Newman, 2023: 239). Although marriage may not prevail as intended and it occurs only for a short period of time, the act of heteronormativity and heterosexual matrix continues to be implemented exclusively to the Inner Party members. The notion of marriage that once existed in 1984 now becomes inexistent to Proles and other categories, as „artsem" (artificial insemination) becomes a safer, more preferable method of reproducing the species. Only from this point onward can the performance of strong masculinity be entirely attributed to members of the Inner Party or the Thought Police.

Masculinity and Gender Performativity in Male Characters

Masculinity's structure is complex because its performance follows a mix of characteristics. It embodies both 'masculine men' and 'feminine men,' depending on the specific character that Julia encounters. Men who are caught by the regime do not necessarily follow a 'masculine' path in its entirety such as being a "tyrant, inciting woman to revolt and duplicity" (de Beauvoir, 2011: 519), but a mixture of both. That is what Julia herself has had the chance to observe. Some men are the embodiment of femininity through their attachment to their children or through being devoid of any sexuality. Even though female characters may be inherently prone to promiscuity, men do not always fit into this category. Apart from Winston, who is sexually repressed and therefore deals with a "sadistic lust" (Pittock, 2007: 123) that leads to his engagement in sexual acts, the rest of them do not seem to fully be affected by any sort of sexual repression. The representation of masculinity differs between Outer Party men to Inner Party men, as the authority over women shifts drastically. Outer Party men cannot engage in relationships with women first, but it is the women who initiate them. On the other hand, Inner Party men do initiate relationships, and they all choose women by themselves while Outer Party men are

chosen by women. Their masculinity is enacted differently, based on their authority and relationship to the other person involved.

Inner Party men are the embodiment of strict authority and a strong masculinity that is inherently oppositional to Outer Party men. To some degree, Oceania “is dominated by masculinity” (Weatherly, 2004: 85), yet not all men are masculine or enact stereotypical masculine behavior. Ampleforth and Parsons, two distinct characters, represent a blend of characteristics that reveal their womanlike nature. Deputy Chairman Whitehead and O’Brien are, by any means, their masculine equivalents, representatives of an antagonistic portrayal of strong masculinity. As they may appear stereotypical in their performance of masculinity, Whitehead uses his power to force Vicky, one of Julia’s closest friend and possible lover, to marry him: “he did in front of the others, so they applauded and spoke of my duty to the party, and I couldn’t say no” (Newman, 2023: 239) whereas O’Brien forces Julia to become an agent of the Thought Police.

Ampleforth and Thomas Parsons enact quite a feminine disposition. Ampleforth is not interested in anything beyond platonic relationships and poetry; Thomas Parsons values his children over his own life. Family life appears the sole source of happiness for Parsons, and the loss of language complexity seems alarming to Ampleforth. Both characters represent experiences that Julia cannot, will not, and is unable to have.

Ampleforth represents a foil character to Julia. Reserved, intellectually gifted, passionate about poetry and linguistic sophistication, he enacts a masculinity that is filled with feminine characteristics that Julia herself lacks. Devoid of sexuality, he shows deep sympathy for Julia. Coerced by Julia into having sexual intercourse, he is affected and displeased by the act itself, showing no interest whatsoever. His masculinity does not revolve around sexuality, as it contains neither violence nor lust. Through his platonic love, he is the symbol of a man who portrays sexuality as an intrinsic part of love. Meanwhile, Julia portrays sexuality as a means of unlimited pleasure, a meaningless contact devoid of love who may never be reserved or able to comprehend what was lost at the hands of the authoritarian regime: the power of language. At the same time, Thomas Parsons, another male character, represents a form of maternal devotion towards children. He engages in sexual intercourse with Julia, yet still does not exhibit stereotypical masculine behavior. Unlike Julia, Parsons has children to whom he is devoted, and the reason he dies is because he cannot, by any means, accept the death of his children (Newman, 2023: 294). He remains the representation of motherhood that Julia will never be able to embody.

Sexuality and the Shift of Heterosexuality Towards Homosexual Practices

In 1984, the regime is fundamentally against any type of sexuality in order to create a “total abolition of the sex instinct” (Beauchamp, 2003: 45). Such a measure is the “basis of the regime’s power in the perverse sublimation of repressed sexuality”

(Pittock, 2007: 123). The repression of sexuality causes people to become “war-fever and leader-worship” (idem.), therefore reinforcing the regime’s oppressive power.

In *Julia* (2023), the repressive regime allows sexual acts indirectly through a series of hints. Despite them being strictly forbidden, it is under the control of the state and are commonly practiced as an unwritten rule. The practice of homosexuality is not openly promoted as a norm, yet sexual acts between people of the same sex occur frequently. The impossibility of practicing heteronormative sexuality, even though the regime promotes a strict heterosexual matrix, creates an unexpected consequence: a habitual practice of bisexuality or homosexuality as a means of coping with sexual repression. The heterosexual matrix becomes, in this case, subverted.

The norm of heterosexuality appears to be hidden under the mask of practicing bisexuality or homosexuality due to several reasons. Women appear to be clearly interested in each other’s bodies (Newman, 2023: 30) and even refer to their attraction towards one another as love. Such a mechanism is caused by the fact that now, “even marriage was regarded suspiciously as a source of divided loyalties” (2023: 27). Every single aspect of life becomes, at this point, devoted solely to the Party’s needs, with total intrusion into and destruction of the family as an institution. Through “artsem,” or artificial insemination, each woman becomes pregnant with the sole purpose of producing a child for the party’s newest developed program, which required women to choose artificial insemination over marriage.

Homosexual behavior becomes habitual from a very early age. Under the name of “Reggies,” the behavior is commonly practiced and widely accepted only in the case of men, although it is equally practiced and kept silent among women. In the case of Dr. Louis, homosexuality is accepted due to his status as a doctor who is a reliable source for contraceptives or discreet medical assistance for pregnancy terminations. Other characters, like Vicky, are bisexual or homosexual, even though Julia cannot fully perceive the existence of homosexuality: “It would be a poor sort of girl who didn’t fall in love with a pretty bunkmate from time to time. Julia had Reggies on her mind just now, but such crushes weren’t really *that*” (2023: 83). The performative act of bisexuality is undoubtedly practiced as means of replacing heteronormativity, and therefore, transforming the heteronormativity into a fictive act, even if Julia does not believe in its existence. In the end, the imbalanced gender norms and fictive heterosexuality remain only a façade that must be performed for the Party and maintained by its citizens until they get caught by the Thought Police.

To sum up, the fictionalized account of heterosexuality in *Julia* (2023) is maintained by the incorporation of gender and sexuality that forms the core of 1984. Through the implementation of other sexualities, *Julia* destabilizes the gender balance and heteronormativity, thus revealing alternative practices within a supposedly heterosexual and heteronormative society.

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THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UNDECIDED HOW AMERICAN AND ROMANIAN STUDENTS NAVIGATE AI ETHICS

Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become the defining buzzword of recent years, increasingly integrated into creative and intellectual domains. As a result, questions of ethics and authorship arise more frequently, shifting into a gray area where AI's deontic position is less clear-cut than previously assumed. This study is an examination of how American and Romanian students perceive these issues, focusing on the influence of cultural context and the timeline of AI adoption. While the U.S. has a well-established AI ecosystem across various sectors, Romania is still in the early stages of adaptation, potentially shaping differing views on AI-generated content, ethical considerations, and the legitimacy of AI as an author. Through questionnaires, this research gathers both quantitative and qualitative data, analyzing student perspectives based on societal familiarity and historical exposure to artificial intelligence. The findings offer a cross-cultural comparison of this age group's approach stance on AI, contributing to ongoing discussions about its integration and ethical implications.

The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines the verb "to plagiarize" as "to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own: use (another's production) without crediting the source." Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary declares "source" and "author" as synonyms, providing the following definition for the latter: "one that originates or creates something." This appears to be relatively clear-cut terminology, widely used to define this subgenre of academic misconduct. In order for plagiarism to also be prosecuted, identification is the first step. Despite the illusionary safety net provided by plagiarism detection softwares, academics and institutions are facing new challenges when it comes to navigating research ethics. These detection softwares navigate the web, as well as predetermined databases and submissions provided by the users, in order to detect plagiarism in an efficient manner (Montoneri, 2019: 7).

A question to be raised is: What happens when no source, no author is identifiable? In the new age of generative artificial intelligence (AI), this happens to be the case, as the software no longer make predictions based on limited data, but are trained on large scale datasets to create new content based on the dependencies of the material it was trained on (Zewe, 2023). AI takes the information from somewhere and then generates brand new data based on outside knowledge. It marks the beginning of a new direction when it comes to what plagiarism is, whether research ethics are flouted, whether their scope just does not reach far enough yet. A

reflection of the academic world slowly but surely changing in this sense is this revised definition of “plagiarism” by University of Oxford (n.d.):

Presenting work or ideas from another source as your own, with or without consent of the original author, by incorporating it into your work without full acknowledgement.

All published and unpublished material, whether in manuscript, printed or electronic form, is covered under this definition, as is the use of material generated wholly or in part through use of artificial intelligence (save when use of AI for assessment has received prior authorization e.g. as a reasonable adjustment for a student’s disability). Plagiarism can also include re-using your own work without citation. Under the regulations for examinations, intentional or reckless plagiarism is a disciplinary offence.

However, like any major shift, the adoption and impact of AI in education are unfolding at different rates and in varying ways across the world. In 2022, although in a close competition with China, the U.S. was already establishing its leadership in AI, with American institutions dominating cross-country collaborations and leading in conference and repository citations. By 2023, global private investment in AI reached \$91.9 billion, with the U.S. investing roughly 3.5 times more than China. The U.S. also led in AI model production, with 61 notable models, compared to 21 from the EU and 15 from China. This leadership was reinforced in 2024, as U.S. regulators passed a record number of AI regulations, while American tech giants advanced innovation through superior infrastructure and global partnerships (Zhang et al., 2022; Maslej et al., 2023; Maslej et al., 2024).

This paper examines the perspectives of American students, at the heart of the AI revolution, compared to their Romanian counterparts. I employed a methodology involving two identical Google Forms consisting of both quantitative and qualitative questions, which were distributed to Romanian and American students, aiming to capture diverse perspectives on key topics such as the adoption of AI, personal use, ethics, authorship, and its implementation in education. The main hypothesis explored in this paper is that the geographical and historical proximity to the emergence of AI, as we understand it today, lead to a more detached and open-minded attitude regarding the exploitation of artificial intelligence tools for academic purposes.

The surveys show both groups agree AI became mainstream during 2022-2023. However, Romanian students are more likely to associate this shift with that specific period (52%), with 26% citing 2024. In contrast, American students also largely cite 2022-2023 (44%) but have a broader range of exposure, with many seeing AI as mainstreaming earlier, including 2019 or earlier. This difference reflects the influence of information sources in both countries. Romanian students predominantly rely on social media (77.8%), suggesting their view of AI's rise aligns

with recent trends, especially the perception of 2024 as a key year, indicating AI still feels like a new phenomenon for many.

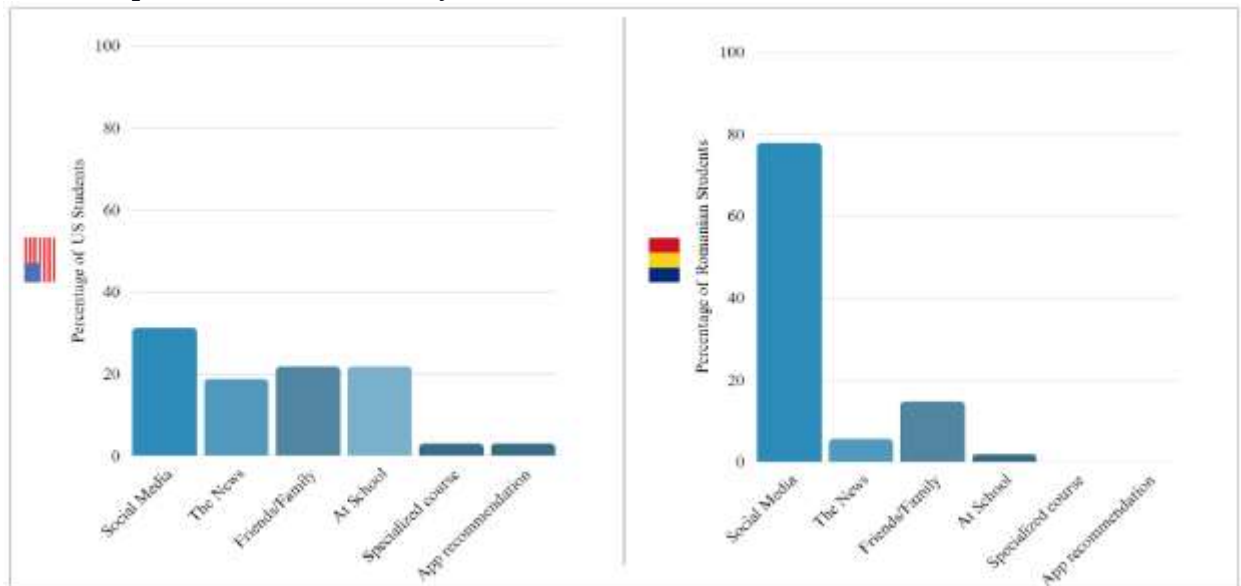


Figure 1: Sources of information regarding AI

On the other hand, American students, who report a more diverse range of sources—including social media, news outlets, and educational institutions (see Fig. 1)—show a more nuanced understanding of AI, with earlier years (2019-2020) being perceived as crucial to AI's mainstream arrival. This diversity in sources could suggest that American students had a more sustained exposure to AI over a longer period, with institutional support and media coverage potentially playing a role in shaping their perception of the technology's maturation and adoption.

When it comes to the ethical perception of AI use, great differences can be seen in the confidence and likelihood of choosing extreme answers, rather than neutral ones. The consensus is that AI can be a helpful tool when used intelligently and ethically, particularly in assignments, but opinions become stricter when it comes to exams. Definite answers on the quantitative questions, however, are characteristic of the American group, with the Romanian students majorly leaning towards a neutral, undecided –albeit nuanced, as the qualitative data reveals– point of view. An impressive 42% of Romanian students who reported using AI for school (89% of total respondents) felt neutral about AI usage, suggesting a balanced view (see Fig. 2). Their neutral stance may reflect an understanding that AI can be beneficial for tasks like researching, summarizing, or aiding in writing, without necessarily replacing the effort or thought required from the student; indecisiveness; or the changing general attitude of Romanian youth regarding this issue. When asked about their perception of others using AI, they expressed forgiveness, particularly when AI aids tasks like assignments, as long as it is not a direct reproduction. Many emphasized that their opinion would only change if AI were used dishonestly, like cheating in exams. Overall, this group views AI as a legitimate academic aid, advocating for its ethical use, especially in high-stakes situations. None of the remaining 58% of

Romanian AI users selected the highest level of guilt (5), though 22% chose 4, overwhelmingly from humanities fields (see Fig. 2). These students commonly use AI for essay writing, revisions, and studying but express strong concerns about its role in high-stakes situations like exams. While they disapprove of AI use for dishonest purposes, such as plagiarism or cheating, they acknowledge its value as a learning aid when used transparently. Most believe AI should be strictly penalized in exams, equating its use to cheating, but that it should be evaluated more flexibly in assignments, depending on whether it assists or replaces original work. As one student put it: “[I would change my opinion about a person] only if they used [AI]

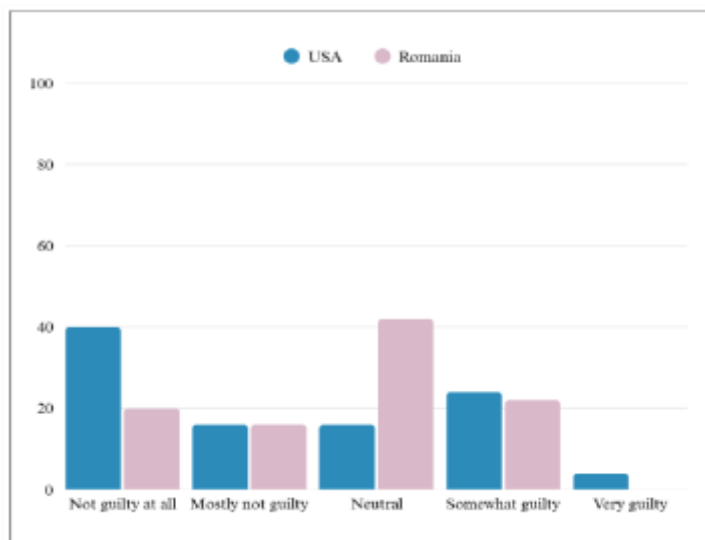


Figure 2: Guilt levels of AI-users

in situations like exams, job competitions, to cheat, plagiarism in their thesis, etc. Cases where there is a stake and a competition that I want to be fair.”

In contrast, 20% of the students who use AI selected 1 on the guilt scale, with 16% choosing 2, showing no clear trend based on field of study. These students view AI more permissively, especially regarding its use in assignments versus exams. Many assert that their opinion of someone would not change based on AI use, as one respondent said: “No. Because it is a tool that facilitates work in any field.” They are also more lenient when it comes to AI-assisted cheating, favoring penalties like failing the test or reexamination over harsher consequences like expulsion. This reflects a growing normalization of AI as an academic tool, with concerns shifting more toward its misuse than its presence in education. The minority of Romanian students who reported that they do not use AI express concerns about its impact on personal development and academic skills, viewing it as a hindrance to genuine learning. They see AI use as unethical, particularly in academic contexts, and would impose strict consequences, such as failing or expulsion.

The United States group had similar stances when it came to their responses to the open-ended questions. A major difference was the emotional involvement, or lack thereof, both in relation to their own personal values, as well as others’ decision

to engage in the practice of using AI. Among the 78% of American students who reported using AI for academic tasks, only one person selected the highest level of guilt (5) on the scale, while 24% chose 4. For those who reported higher levels of guilt, the most common uses of AI were for essay writing, data processing, and revision. Interestingly, their opinions on whether they would change their perspective of someone who uses AI vary widely. Some students, reflecting a more casual attitude, stated that they would not judge others for using AI, with one respondent remarking, "No. I do that too. Not interested in all the exams ... so why bother?!"

On the other hand, some expressed more critical views, with one student saying: "It would mostly depend on the type of AI. I don't respect people who use AI to generate images, or who use it to write their whole essay. They should be putting more original effort in." This variation suggests that while these students feel guilty about their own AI usage, their judgments of others are less stringent. Despite their personal guilt, most respondents adopt a lenient stance on punishment for AI use, advocating for measures like simply failing the exam or task, or even suggesting no consequences at all. This indicates a disconnection between their self-imposed guilt and their expectations for the behavior of others.

In contrast to the Romanian respondents, only 16% of American students chose a neutral stance (3) on the guilt scale, and an equal percentage (16%) expressed mild remorse (2). A significant 40% of students reported feeling no guilt at all (1 on the scale), with no identifiable trend based on field of study. The no-guilt group tends to show little judgment toward others using AI, though they do express some reluctance about overuse. Many view AI simply as a tool, akin to a calculator. One student put it this way: "I think AI is a tool, just like a calculator. Do you need a calculator to do math? No, but it sure [...] helps on a trigonometry test. If you learn to do it yourself, then have the menial parts taken care of, that's fine." While these students are generally lenient toward their peers' use of AI, they set boundaries on how much AI should be involved in their work. They support harsher penalties for cheating, though they don't specify what constitutes "cheating" with AI. Despite their relaxed stance, there is a clear trend of viewing AI as a valuable resource for the future, with students adopting a pragmatic, utilitarian approach to its use.

American students who do not use AI often view it as unethical, morally wrong, or even plagiarism, valuing personal effort and academic integrity. Interestingly, some see it as not worth the effort or risk, a perspective not shared by Romanian respondents. A higher percentage of American students reported not using AI compared to their Romanian counterparts. This adds complexity to my hypothesis but does not necessarily disprove it. While American students' proximity to AI development might lead to a more lenient stance among users, the higher rate of non-users suggests concerns about ethics or academic rigor, even if less pronounced than in Romania.

As previously mentioned, plagiarism implies an author who has not been properly given credit. AI taking part in any creative process has to have at least a

bare minimum of human involvement, which can vary depending on the intention of the user. However, the degree of human involvement needed for originality is debated and divisive among students. The survey presented both groups with five scenarios exploring AI authorship in academic settings: (1) copying and pasting an assignment into an AI tool; (2) using AI to generate a full piece, then editing it; (3) providing prompts and guiding AI responses; (4) completing a task independently and asking AI to review it; (5) and using AI for prompts or inspiration but completing the task independently.

In the first three scenarios, both groups had similar responses, with most agreeing that there is no right to human authorship in the first case, and varied opinions on the next two, which involved some human guidance. “Shared authorship” was the most common response for these scenarios. However, differences emerged in the last two, where human involvement was higher. In the fourth scenario, where a person completed a task independently and then asked AI for suggestions, both groups agreed the person deserved authorship, but American students were more unified, with about 90% giving full credit to the human. Similarly, in the fifth scenario, where a person asked AI for inspiration but completed the task independently, American students showed stronger consensus, also granting authorship to the person, suggesting that cultural differences may influence perceptions of originality, with American students placing greater emphasis on individual agency and ownership.

As established earlier, generative AI uses transfer learning to train. This means that the newly created material produced by AI tools is inherently based on works belonging to others, further complicating the issue of authorship and originality. The unauthorized use of others' works through AI represents a significant violation of intellectual honesty, raising serious concerns about the authenticity and originality of the resulting works (Lazăr et al., 2024: 2). Similarly to the previously discussed topics, Romanian students leaned towards neutrality when asked directly about the fact that AI uses human created content to “feed” its algorithm and how this affects human creators. American students, on the other hand, showed more concern and awareness of the issue, with over 60% choosing the two highest options on the gradation scale. This contributes to the idea slowly showing its outline throughout this study: the recent focus of the public eye on AI is still superficial in Romania, with an obvious lack of literacy and education on the topic.

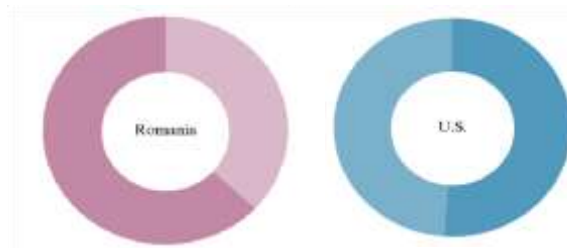


Figure 3: Agreement with AI grading

While it is highly discussed and debated, there is need for a deeper, more serious delve into the actual moral implications of AI implementation, which the students already subconsciously understand, as reflected by the qualitative data collected. Interestingly enough, when presented with the idea of AI being used *on* them, instead of *by* them, students are less open, as they believe AI may lack the ability to fully understand and assess their work. This contrast underscores the importance of balancing AI's benefits with its limitations, particularly in areas requiring nuanced judgment. While in agreement that professors using AI for generating materials is acceptable, all students presented serious concerns related to AI grading.

In conclusion, this study fulfills a diagnostic purpose and confirms that cultural and historical proximity to AI development shapes student perspectives, supporting the hypothesis that American students, with earlier and more sustained exposure, exhibit a more nuanced, pragmatic approach to AI ethics and authorship compared to their Romanian counterparts. The U.S. group's decisiveness—whether in embracing AI as a tool or condemning its misuse—reflects a familiarity with AI's complexities, while Romanian students' neutrality suggests cautious adaptation amid evolving norms. However, the higher percentage of American non-users complicates this narrative, suggesting that multiple factors, beside historical and geographical proximity, are at play when it comes to national adoption. This divergence underscores the need for deeper exploration into how socio-cultural, educational, and individual factors intersect with AI integration. Future research could expand cross-cultural comparisons, investigate institutional roles in shaping attitudes, and track longitudinal shifts as AI literacy grows globally. Ultimately, this paper highlights AI's dual role as both a transformative tool and a source of ethical tension, urging balanced frameworks that harness its potential while addressing its challenges.

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TECHNIQUES OF THE ABSTRACT

UNDERSTANDING MULTIPLE EXPOSURE PHOTOGRAPHY THROUGH FILMIC MONTAGE

Abstract

As photography and film share common roots, the concept of filmic montage provides a useful starting point for understanding multiple exposure photographs, because the operation of montage editing is similar to the operation of multiple exposure photographs. This paper aims to examine whether multiple exposure photographs can be compared with the Soviet montage technique and can be brought closer to spectators. For this, I use the works of three American photographers, Harry Callahan, Jerry Uelsmann and Man Ray, along with *Man with a Movie Camera*, a film by the Soviet cinematographer Dziga Vertov. The focus of the paper is on the perception and understanding of multiple exposure photographs, and whether they can be brought closer to the viewer in terms of comprehension. To develop a comprehensive critical framework for the understanding of the operation of multiple exposure, the theories of Roland Barthes and Jacques Rancière are also utilized.

Introduction

Multiple exposure is a common photographic technique but is underexplored in theoretical discussions. Inspired by the artistic nature of film montage and my experiments with double- and multiple-exposure photography, I noticed similarities in how they engage perception and mental processes. While film theory has extensively analyzed montage, the connection between filmic montage and photographic techniques like multiple exposures remains underexamined. This paper aims to explore these parallels, drawing on the ideas of Roland Barthes, Jacques Rancière, and the principles of Soviet montage theory. Although photography traditionally freezes a single moment and film unfolds over time, these two areas can still be connected because they share some similarities. Drawing a connection between these two areas and identifying their similarities helps establish the link between filmic montage and multiple exposure photographs. Moreover, filmic montage may offer an effective framework for understanding multiple exposure photographs.

One of the most significant aspects of multiple exposure photographs is that the images exposed on top of one another collectively create a single photograph: their sum constitutes the whole. For these reasons and because of the similarities between filmic montage and multiple exposure photographs, I examine whether the

concept of filmic montage and multiple exposure photographs can be compared in terms of perception and understanding, and whether they can be brought closer to the viewer in terms of comprehension. In my attempt to understand multiple exposure photographs, I draw upon the works of American photographers: Harry Callahan, Jerry Uelsmann, and Man Ray, and also on Dziga Vertov's influential film, *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929).



Figure 1: Jerry Uelsmann, *Voyager* (2008)



Figure 2: Harry Callahan, *Province (Shepherds)* (ca. 1966)



Figure 3: Man Ray, *Rayograph* (1922)

Multiple exposure photographs and filmic montage

Multiple exposure photographs are photographs exposed on top of each other. This can be achieved using both analogue and digital techniques. When created with analogue cameras, multiple exposures are made on the same section of film. The process is similar to that of digital cameras, where the number of exposures can be pre-selected and the camera combines them automatically. Additionally, these effects can be created during post-production, either in a darkroom using traditional techniques or through digital software.

How shots are put together to create a film is referred to as editing (Hayward, 2023: 154). One editing style, the montage, became used in Soviet cinema between 1924 and 1930; the leading figures of this style were Sergei Eisenstein, Lev Kuleshov, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Dziga Vertov (Bordwell, 1972: 9). It served as a tool to control rhythm, create rhetorical points and metaphors, and construct narrative by directing the viewer's focus from one narrative element to another or creating an artificial sense of time and space (Bordwell, 1972: 9).

The Kuleshov effect illustrates that cinematic meaning emerges from the arrangement of shots in a sequence, rather than from an individual shot on its own. Therefore, visual meaning and content are created by the arrangement and combination of shots. The specific content of each shot is less crucial than how two shots with different content are linked and the way their transition is structured (Prince and Hensley, 1992: 60). Changing the context of a shot by putting it in a different order changes the meaning of both the sequence and the shot. The meaning of a filmic shot is acquired by the shots coming before and after it (Hayward, 2023: 386). For the spectator, the effect of juxtaposition is that the expression on the actor's

face (Ivan Mozzhukhin) in Kuleshov's experiment changes as a result of the shifting sequence of shots (Hayward 2023: 386).

This is also true for multiple exposure photographs: the arrangement of layers, different photographs exposed on top of each other, has more power than individual photographs themselves would have, because of the effect they have on the spectator. Just as in the case of filmic montage, when creating multiple exposure photographs, different meanings can be conveyed simply by combining the layers in different ways. A compelling example of this can be seen in the photographs of Jerry Uelsmann (see Figure 1).

Eisenstein presented a more radical view on montage (Hayward, 2023: 387). In his perspective, montage is not based on mere juxtapositions, but rather on collision and conflict. This conflict arises both between the shots and within the individual shots themselves (Hayward, 2023: 386). When one looks at a multiple exposure photograph, both collision and conflict are present. Eisenstein employed the montage technique with the intention of provoking thought in the spectator (Hayward, 2023: 389). Eisenstein's montage theory is also very similar to what happens in the case of multiple exposure photographs, but an important difference is that superimpositions in photographs are present not only in the mind and during perception, but also in the photographs themselves, whereas in filmic montage, they are only present on the level of perception. Eisenstein demonstrated this idea using the example of a bird, a child, and a mouth. When the shots of the bird and the mouth are juxtaposed, they lead to the meaning of "to sing", in contrast to the juxtaposition of the child and the mouth, which produces the meaning of "to scream" (Andrew, 1976: 51). Since multiple exposure photographs lack a moving nature, the equivalent of the previously mentioned "cells" or "building blocks" are the layers they contain.

In the case of Eisenstein's montage works, it is important that the collision creates a third meaning in the mind of the spectator, arising from the interaction of the two sets of images (Hayward, 2023: 157). Therefore, the meaning of the sets of images is created by the spectator, requiring a creative response from them (Hayward, 2023: 157). The fact that a "third set of images" is constructed in the mind of a spectator (Hayward, 2023: 157) might also be true for multiple exposure photographs due to their layered structure. Multiple exposure photographs contain several images, which are presented to the spectator more rapidly than in Eisenstein's montages. While the shots of Eisenstein are moving, leaving little time for the spectator to think about them, photographs still allow the viewer to examine them for a much longer period. Due to the continuous nature of the filmic montage, whether there will be a third meaning, a mental image of two occurring shots, is completely dependent on the spectator's previous knowledge and how he or she perceives the information. In contrast, in the case of multiple exposures, this third meaning, this mental image is already there as the spectator looks at the photograph, since the "shots", the layers are superimposed on one another due to the technical characteristics of the process.

Man with a Movie Camera

Dziga Vertov (1896-1954), who was a cinematographer in the Soviet Union, employed rapidly montaged scenes, unusual camera angles, and superimpositions in his films (Marien, 2021). In *Man with a Movie Camera*, the spectator follows a cameraman as he captures modern life in the city (Marien, 2021). His work in this film was influenced by the previously mentioned ideas of Lev Kuleshov (Hayward 2023: 386). In terms of comprehension, this film is a challenge for the audience, because of its complex chains of signification, created by the editing process (Nelmes, 2012: 469, 471).



Figure 4: Still from Dziga Vertov, 'Man with a Movie Camera'



Figure 5: Still from Dziga Vertov, 'Man with a Movie Camera'

While we can clearly distinguish the layers on the stills from *Man with a Movie Camera*, recognising the separate layers in multiple exposures is much harder.

Studium, punctum and the pensive image

The ideas of Roland Barthes can greatly enhance the understanding of multiple exposure photographs. Barthes introduces two key elements in his influential book, *Camera Lucida*, which are essential when discussing and interpreting photographs: the opposition of *studium* and *punctum*. According to him, the general interest, understanding, and cultural knowledge that a viewer brings to a photograph is referred to as *studium*. The other concept by which a photograph can be studied is the *punctum*, which, in contrast to the *studium*, is not a general understanding but an element in the photograph that is present yet cannot be explicitly named. The *punctum* "pricks" the viewer and captures their attention, although, as mentioned previously, the viewer cannot identify exactly what it is that draws their attention (Barthes, 2010: 25–27). If they can name it, it is not the *punctum*, but rather the *studium* (Barthes, 2010: 51).

There is a key difference from the original *studium-punctum* theory when it comes to multiple exposure photographs. There, it is often the *punctum* that is

recognized first due to the complex and multi-layered nature of these images. It is the *studium* that is connected to the *punctum* and not the other way around. With multiple exposure photographs, meaning and understanding do not come immediately because there are more layers and images present. It is a kind of disorientation, similar to the “prick” that is first noticed in these photographs, with the *studium* appearing individually at these levels. When these two levels come together, and the meaning is constructed by the viewer, is when we get to the *studium*, before that, it is only the *punctum*.

Moreover, due to this multi-layered nature, multiple meanings can emerge, arising across various levels. Even though the layers of the multiple exposure photographs cannot be separated, the individual layers bring potentially different meanings with them. All of these meanings are added together and the meaning is formed by their co-existence. In the case of multiple exposure photographs these multiple layers and their meanings may cease to exist individually and merge instead. In this process, the meanings extinguish each other to some extent, and a third meaning emerges, similar to the Kuleshov effect. This newly formed meaning ultimately brings us back to Roland Barthes’ concepts. The meaning, from the co-existence of these images, is created by the spectator.

In his essay “The Third Meaning,” Roland Barthes introduced a third layer of understanding of images in film and photography. He demonstrates his ideas through examples from Eisenstein’s films. The first level is the informational level, while the second is the symbolic level. The first, informational level is the level of communication: it contains everything that can be known (Barthes, 1977: 52). The second, symbolic level contains different kinds of symbolism. The third meaning is similar to the *punctum*. This third level cannot be named but holds the attention of the spectator as the *punctum* does. This level appears to go beyond the straightforward, structured path and both beyond the informational and symbolic levels with their connotations; instead, it seems to open up an endless field of meaning (Barthes, 1977: 55). In the operation of the filmic montage, this third meaning is a multiple exposure created in the spectator’s mind, while multiple exposure photographs have this characteristic due to their layered structure. This level of meaning cannot be described, because it does not replicate anything (Barthes, 1977: 61). It is also at this level that meaning emerges without directly addressing the story (Barthes, 1977: 64). As this level is similar to the *punctum*, it is composed of small things that get the attention of the viewer but cannot be explained.

Due to the mental processes and the strong connection between the *studium* and *punctum*, these layers emerge both in the photographs and in the mind. This leads us to the concept of the ‘pensive image’ by Jacques Rancière, which refers to a state where the spectator is curious, but has thoughts that they are unable to identify clearly. This state is somewhere between being active and passive, meaning that the spectator is neither entirely active, nor passive (Rancière, 2008: 107). Rancière stated in his book, *The Emancipated Spectator*, that the concepts of the *studium* and the

punctum become one by being blurred together (2008: 109–111). In multiple exposure photographs, the layers containing the *studium* and the *punctum* also blur, emerge, because these layers are present together.

The concept of 'pensive image' is also in strong connection with Roland Barthes' 'third meaning', since none of them represents the concrete meaning, but the possibility of different meanings and interpretations. This pensiveness is also the result of a state in which the viewer is between the author's thought and his or her own interpretation (Rancière, 2008: 122). It also pauses the action and keeps the moment alive, but stops it from reaching a clear ending, leaving everything uncertain (Rancière, 2008: 123). Pensiveness is present in multiple exposures, because with more layers, the spectator is constantly switching between them and spending more time analysing multiple exposure photographs than with filmic montage, as the latter goes forward and changes with time. With this pensiveness, the intention of the artist is present, but the meaning is created by the spectator (Rancière, 2008: 128). Therefore, it can be said that the 'pensive image' evokes thoughts. These thoughts cannot be identified by the spectator, as in the case of Barthes' 'third meaning' and *punctum*. Because these thoughts cannot be identified, the attention of the spectator is held by the pensiveness for much longer than in the case of filmic montage, where there is no time for thinking about the occurring shots, as they are changing over time.

Conclusion

In this paper, I aimed to examine whether the multiple exposure photographs can be compared with the Soviet montage technique and can be brought closer to the spectators. For this, I drew on the works of three American photographers, Harry Callahan, Jerry Uelsmann and Man Ray, along with Dziga Vertov's film, 'Man with a Movie Camera'. The operation of montage editing is like the operation of multiple exposure photographs.

The meaning of a cinematic shot in montage technique is acquired by the shots that come before and after it; with multiple exposure, the "building blocks" or the layers are present at the same time and can be viewed for a longer period of time than moving shots. Whether there will be a third meaning, a mental image of two occurring shots, is completely dependent on the spectator's previous knowledge and how they perceive the information, due to the fast pace of the Soviet montage. In contrast, in the case of the multiple exposures, this third meaning, this mental image is already there as the spectator looks at the photograph, since the "shots", the layers are superimposed on one another due to the technical characteristics of the process.

In getting closer to multiple exposure photographs, Roland Barthes's concepts of *studium* and *punctum* are also important terms, but due to the complexity of these photographs, it is often the *punctum* that is recognised first, and not the *studium*, and it is the *studium* that is connected to the *punctum*, not the other way around. Both in

the case of Barthes's 'third meaning' and Rancière's 'pensive image', no concrete meaning is represented, but the possibility of different meanings and interpretations. During this pensiveness, the spectator is switching between the different layers. In the operation of filmic montage, the third meaning created is akin to a multiple exposure, formed in the spectator's mind. In contrast, multiple exposure photographs achieve this nature due to their layered structure, which generates pensiveness in the viewer. While they share many similarities, they operate in different ways in the mental processes they evoke.

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