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THE FALLEN WOMEN IN *DAN LENO AND THE LIMEHOUSE GOLEM* BY PETER ACKROYD AND IN *THE LIMEHOUSE GOLEM* DIRECTED BY JUAN CARLOS MEDINA

The purpose of this essay is to analyze the novel *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* written by Peter Ackroyd and the movie *The Limehouse Golem* directed by Juan Carlos Medina and to outline the condition of women as presented in the two works. I consider that both the movie and the novel are representative of Neo-Victorian fiction because they reflect the social place and perspective on women's status during the Victorian Age. The present paper notes, from a feminist point of view, in the first part, the common ideas linked to women's status found in both works, whereas the second part of the essay deals with the different endings of the two works and what these endings suggest about the condition of women in the Victorian period.

First of all, feminist criticism is concerned with how literature, like other cultural products, presents or undermines the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women (Tyson 2006: 83). Both Ackroyd's novel and Medina's movie follow the hard life of Elizabeth Cree showing the injustices suffered by her as a woman during the Victorian Age. Both works present the few roles that women could have during the Victorian period, as all the female characters are either wives, maids, prostitutes, or low paid actresses in the music halls. This shows that women did not have a lot of options when it came to what they did for a living: they either got married and were supported by their husbands or they had to compromise their morality and become prostitutes. This idea is shown through the character of Elizabeth who is forced to give up her acting career when she gets married because it was not fit for a married lady to act in music halls. Also, in both the novel and the movie adaptation, there is a clear parallel between Dan Leno who plays women's roles in the music hall, and Lizzie who finds success when she plays men's roles. However, Dan Leno is much more respected and has greater success than Lizzie, and in the end, Lizzie has to get married because she needs someone to protect her against the world, as John Cree tells her during one of their walks in chapter thirty-six.

During an interview for an article titled *The real history behind Victorian thriller* 'The Limehouse Golem,' the film producer of *The Limehouse Golem*, Stephen Wolley talks about the portrayal of women in the movie:

> It was a really horrific time for women. Domestic violence was rife: it happened every day. There was a lot of alcohol, despair, and horror behind closed doors. You see some of this in the way that the character Lizzie [played by Olivia Cooke] is treated. She is in a really bad place in the film – any woman of that time would be. When she gets married, that's the end of her life. Her inability to have sex means that she will

> never be a mother, making it impossible for her to fulfil society's expectations of her. She was a 'freak.' (History Extra 2017)

In the same interview, he is also asked about Dan Leno's character and his portrayal of women in the music halls. Wolley states that Leno was a voice for women during the Victorian Age, given the fact that it was easier for him, a man dressed as a woman, to present to the public women's problems than women themselves. He continues to say that:

> A woman saying the same thing would have been booed off the stage: it would have been considered 'unfemale' or 'unfeminine'. But Dan Leno was able to talk about women's issues (such as domestic violence) on a public platform and that was accepted.
>
> In the film, Dan Leno understands Lizzie. He was an incredibly bright man: he knew that you were never going to go far as a woman and he knew that Lizzie would never be treated as a proper actress. That was her glass ceiling. The message from society was: 'This is where you are now, Lizzie, and this is where you will stay – don't imagine you'll get higher than this.' And, of course, she couldn't. (History Extra 2017)

According to Loiselle (2020: 54), another proof of how women's voices were subdued to men is the fact that, in the movie, Lizzie's voice is subsumed by Leno's voice who is playing her role in the music hall and only because of him, a man dressed as a woman, the spectators listen to Lizzie's story.

Second of all, in both the novel and the movie adaptation, the identity of the Limehouse Golem is shocking and it can be considered a 'feminist plot twist.' The fact that Lizzie turns out to be the murderer and that throughout the storyline no one suspected her shows how neglected women were in Victorian society and how they were considered inferior to men. Due to the simple fact that she was a woman, she was able to pass unobserved, as no one could have ever believed that a woman would have the intellectual capacity to orchestrate something so complex.

At the end of the novel, Lizzie confesses to the priest who has come to absolve her of her sins. She admits that she created her own play through her murderers and that she intentionally gave her husband, John Cree, the role of the Limehouse Golem. The end of the play created by her was supposed to be revealed only after her death when the police would find her husband's diary, written by Elizabeth herself in his name. It was supposed to prove that he was indeed the Limehouse Golem and so she would be considered a martyr. The fact that she really believed in her play had also noted in "Theatrical Role-Playing, Crime and Punishment in Peter Ackroyd's *Dan Leno and The Limehouse Golem (1994)*:"

> Moreover, she transcends her body during her execution. Her hanging is organized as a real spectacle, with a careful organization of the space of the scaffold, the route

> of her procession, and the location of the coffin on her way to add an effect of sensationalism. (Firato 2012: 80)

Her commitment to this play and her wish to have her husband defamed even after his death could show her determination to have the power to destroy the reputation of a man in a society where men were considered to be the superior gender that could have done no wrong. Through her genius plan, she could have proven that a woman was capable of destroying a man's image and then looked like a martyr after she had killed him, spiting, at the same time, Victorian society, which saw the act of killing one's husband as an absolute sin. It judged women harshly, despite the fact that most of the women were abused by their husbands who weren't punished for that in any way. Her plan, however, does not work, Ackroyd showing again how neglected women were in Victorian society and how her efforts were in vain in the end as the journal wrote by her was never found, and thus the identity of the Limehouse Golem remained a mystery for the public.

In the movie, on the other hand, the ending is the exact opposite of that of the novel, as Lizzie wishes her confession to prove that she had been the mastermind behind the murders of the Limehouse Golem. However, in the end, she just becomes a martyr. The idea that women were weak, innocent beings, was so impregnated in the minds of the Victorians that not even inspector Kildare fathoms the possibility that Elizabeth was the Limehouse Golem. On the contrary, he wishes to protect her at all costs, thinking that she is innocent and that she only killed her husband because she knew that he was a murderer and by killing him she just wanted to protect others.

Lizzie understands the fact that she will never be a serious theatre actress and she will never achieve the fame that she craved because of her inferior status in Victorian society, so she turns this situation in her favor and takes advantage of the fact that no one would have believed that an innocent Victorian lady would be capable of becoming a serial killer. She believed that as a serial killer she would have obtained the fame that society denied her as a music hall actress. For her, the crimes she committed became scenes in plays and her greatest role became that of the Limehouse Golem. Inspector Kildare suspects John Cree of being the murderer because of how theatrical all the murders appeared, and he thinks that because Cree failed to become famous through the play that he wrote, he was trying to create another play through his murders and this way to obtain the fame that he wanted as a playwright. The inspector does not stop for even one second to think that Lizzie also suffered a great failure in her theatre career as an actress and could also use the role of the Golem to bring her the fame that she could not get in her acting career. In the end, when Lizzie tells him that she is the Golem, the inspector chooses to hide this truth from the world letting the blame fall on John Cree and thus making Lizzie a martyr.

Moreover, Elizabeth commits all the murders dressed as a man, just as she was dressed when she was at the peak of her acting career in the music hall. The role of her acting as a man brought her fame back then and so, now, she wanted through this new performance to achieve the great fame that she thought she deserved.

> Therefore, [...] her dressing as a Gentleman when carrying out the killing merely reinforces, in the movie, the perceived recognition of the symbolic and physical power of men. The fact that it is a woman after all who carries out the killing (thus giving a sense of 'he who laughs last, laughs loudest') might provide the twist for the storyline. However, within the bigger context no one will ever know that, but the one police inspector who burnt the conclusive evidence. (Menis 2017: 227)

In the movie she is denied of her wish to achieve fame and prove that a woman is capable of such cruel and well-planned crimes and she is only considered a simple martyr that betrayed her husband for the better of others.

In both the novel and the movie adaptation, Elizabeth kills her husband knowing that she will be caught because of this crime. She knows that she has no way of escaping this sentence, being aware that a wife that was suspected of killing her husband would never have any convincing arguments or proof strong enough to convince the rough and judgmental Victorian society of her innocence. Any woman that was suspected of such a great sin was automatically sentenced, no matter if she was actually guilty or not of that crime and despite her motive for committing that crime. In the movie, she wants to get caught to tell the inspector that she was the Golem and this way she would finally receive the fame that she wanted, and in the book, she wanted to get caught because she is afraid that her husband will destroy her play that she so carefully created.

In conclusion, both Ackroyd and Medina presented, through their works, the condition of women in the Victorian age. From the analysis of the two works, it has been observed the vision of the two authors on the low status that women had during that period and how unfair they were treated by Victorian society. We can say that behind the crimes of the Limehouse Golem there were hidden the crimes of society against women.

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FORGING AUTHENTICITY:
THE MATERIALISATION OF THIRD ORDER SIMULATION IN JULIAN BARNES'S *ENGLAND, ENGLAND*

The comfort of having a terrestrial debut free from all dubiety is what attracts humans to early remembrances. However, two major dilemmas arise along with the issue of authentic memories. How fickle a seamstress is memory? And are we thrown into the world like the proverbial dog without a bone? Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) referred to the involuntary coming into existence as the "thrownness" (die Geworfenheit) of the Dasein (West-Pavlov 2013: 330). As West-Pavlov explains it, existence has an expiration date, "our being in the world is a being-unto-death from the very moment we are born" (2013: 44). The protagonist of Julian Barnes's 1998 novel seeks to find a deeper meaning to life, without realising that "thrownness" is considered to be not only a limitation of existence, but also "futurity of being" (West-Pavlov 2013: 45). Although death ends life, it also supplies existence with possibility.

The present study focuses on instances of inauthentic character which appear in Julian Barnes's 1998 novel *England, England*. The paper garners sartorial evidence of character forging, and seeks to portray the methods through which Sir Jack Pitman, business magnate and master of perversion, re-creates a vision of England which manages to overshadow the original. The novelty of the research stems from careful interpretation of the text in accordance with Heideggerian philosophy. The sartorial element seeks to offer a new take on Baudrillard's theory of third order simulation.

The novel begins with Martha Cochrane, who forges her earliest memories in the same way in which Sir Jack Pitman forges history. Her main dilemma arises when she suspects that forged memories lead to forging an inauthentic character. Do memories forge the individual? Or does the individual forge the memories? Martha believes that "childhood was remembered in a succession of incidents which explained why you were the person you had turned out to be" (Barnes 2012: 242).

In the absence of accurate remembrance and memory, Martha thinks she is unable to possess relativity of self, which she considers necessary in order to discover in others what she seeks, namely a relationship free from games and deception (Barnes 2012: 97). At the same time, Paul, her love interest, hints at his desire for personal validation as he initially believes that "falling in love with Martha made things real" (Barnes 2012: 103). Martha's cogitations on happiness and true nature (Barnes 2012: 226) are riddled with instances of inauthenticity, i.e. Martha's inauthentic sexual gratification (Barnes 2012: 52).

Following the rise in mass migration in post-war Britain, specifically that of South Asian cricket enthusiasts, Lord Norman Tebbit, Tory member of the British Parliament, devised the controversial loyalty concept of "the cricket test." By doing

so, Tebbit questioned the allegiance to the Crown of immigrants of mixed ethnic descent who did not favour the British cricket club (Carvel 2004). Although the remarks of the politician were racially insensitive, his attitude resonates with Sir Jack's excessive allusions to patriotism. The magnate's choice of wearing celebrated Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) egg and bacon braces makes him a candidate sure to pass the Tebbit cricket test. Although he does not belong to the MCC, Pitman believes that owning the braces "implied as much" (Barnes 2012: 30). He fancies himself "a rebel at heart . . . a bit of a maverick" (Barnes 2012: 30).

The choice of Académie Française braces serves as proof of his status as a self-proclaimed genius (Barnes 2012: 112). In similar fashion, when aspiring to gain sovereignty over the Isle of Wight, Pitman chooses to wear his Palace of Westminster braces in an attempt to undermine the power of the two houses of the Parliament of the United Kingdom (Barnes 2012: 168). Furthermore, the heavily-embellished Governor's uniform which Sir Jack opts for reeks of "sartorial clangour" (Barnes 2012: 213) and of an undying belief in his everlasting power, his sense of dominance being unaltered by the possible downfall brought on by Martha's blackmail.

Pitman further strives to achieve sartorial authenticity during his countryside walks, yet creates an inauthentic identity through overcompensation. Although his "tweed deerstalker, hunter's jacket, cavalry twills, gaiters, hand-crafted doe-skin boots and fell-walker's stave" provoked a snicker from a group of hikers, the delusional mind of Sir Jack does not acknowledge embarrassment (Barnes 2012: 42). He opts for simpler attire in order to show a certain familiarity with Jerry, evidence of their conspiring attitudes (Barnes 2012: 213). Jerry sees King George's succession as "pure marketing" on the part of English Parliament (Barnes 2012: 217), proving that he shares a similar plutocratic view of the world as Pitman.

Sir Jack suffers from delusions of grandeur which become evident through his self-proclaimed status of "massive benefactor" (Barnes 2012: 124). He takes pride in the tautological motto passed on to him by Sir Smeaton – "you do it by doing it" (Barnes 2012: 125). Smeaton is held in such reverence by the magnate, that Pitman conveys onto his mentor an almost-papal status, referencing the famous "sic transit gloria mundi" aphorism (Barnes 2012: 125).

Pitman is not the sole perpetrator in the matter of inauthentic sartorial choice. Throughout the novel, a wide variety of characters engage in creating false personas by dressing for the specific personal image they wish to convey. At the height of her career, Martha becomes "dressed by [Sir Jack]," as Paul implies with a savage keenness (Barnes 2012: 204). At the end of the novel, she is wearing "an ancient pair of jodhpurs," as she regains a notion of authenticity by embracing a provincial outlook on life (Barnes 2012: 258).

Sir Jack harbours a belief that there is no distinction between Nature and Man (Barnes 2012: 73), a belief which fuels his desire for inauthenticity. Pitman is known to be "ritualistic and inauthentic" (Barnes 2012: 75); he is driven by an atavistic need for power. He boasts about not wanting yes-men around, yet Mark knows not to show

competitiveness, but sycophancy (Barnes 2012: 74). Moreover, Sir Jack's compliments are not genuine, but personal appropriations of such phrases as "bungaloid dystopia," which are produced by his employees (Barnes 2012: 76).

The role of the Techno-Development department at Pitman's company is to come up with more "authentic" elements, yet inaccuracy lies at the base of the company's leisure theory. Pitco studies support Pitman's theories: after witnessing a perfect replica of Michelangelo's statue of David, visitors of the Piazza della Signoria "felt no need to seek out the 'original' in a museum" (Barnes 2012: 181). Convenience becomes central to a consumer society, as Martha explains in a Wall Street Journal interview. Traditional tourism issues such as poor infrastructure and crowded buses are avoided. On "*England, England*" territory even the postcards come pre-stamped (Barnes 2012: 179).

The media tycoon wants to re-build England on the Isle of Wight. The venture implies both replicating British tourist attractions deemed quintessential, and the re-modelling of national heritage. Pitman's project becomes a universe filled with simulacra, an amalgam of replicas hinted at during the search for a proper logo. The initial list of possible emblems proposed by the Committee ends with the suggestion of a "hippocampus" (Barnes 2012: 120) – a word which has double meaning. It refers either to a mythological creature or to the anatomical part of the brain responsible for creating memories.

The macrocosm of the "England, England" island becomes a Baudrillardian third order simulation. It "belongs to the hyperreal . . . It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology) but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real" (Baudrillard 1995: 10). Pitco seeks not to offer reenactment, but "the thing itself "(Barnes 2012: 59).

Replicas pervade the simulated universe. Waitresses wear Victorian mob caps (Barnes 2012: 123); backdrop churls appear throughout the novel; visitors of the Island dine with "the Great Cham" Samuel Johnson (Barnes 2012: 208), while anachronisms and "cross-epoch-bonding" (Barnes 2012: 208) prove entertaining. The Project's "coarsening simplifications" (Barnes 2012: 206) reinforce the idea of convenience. However, the actors employed to play the parts of historical figures end up losing all traces of personal identity. The most striking example of this phenomenon is the man unfortunate enough to be chosen to re-present Samuel Johnson. His actions transcend method acting; he legally changes his name by deed poll, and replies only in Johnson quotes from Boswell's biography (Barnes 2012: 209-10). Ted Wagstaff offers the "personality slippage" rationale when discussing the Hood Band, diminishing its danger by likening it to a "bit of fun" (Barnes 2012: 221). Yet it is a full immersion into the simulated universe rather than a mere slippage.

The Hood myth is made politically correct by expunging what society currently deems repulsive - red meat for example (Barnes 2012: 222). Friar Tuck's ox meat is replaced by a vegan alternative. As long as his cooking methods are considered "properly medieval" by the audience, the vegetarian diet seems plausible.

Unfortunately, the meat alternative's inauthentic nature prompted the Hood gang to steal and mutilate Dingle Woolly Steer (Barnes 2012: 223), which in turn led to Martha's downfall. "Military thespianry" (Barnes 2012: 225) is employed by false SAS leader Mad Mike, while over-identification with their characters forces the Hood actors to become genuine criminals.

Infancy is also replicated through the fetish services provided by Auntie May and Lucy (Barnes 2012: 155). Pitman goes to great lengths in order to avoid the onus of moral turpitude. However, his secret is discovered by Martha and Paul who employ the services of Gary Desmond, a journalist formerly at the service of Sir Jack.

It seems that only Dr. Johnson's pain is authentic, "because it came from authentic contact with the world" (Barnes 2012: 218). Martha is in a state of denial. She considers irrelevant the fact that the Island was responsible for the actor's delusions (Barnes 2012: 217). Paul mentions a composer who invents "authentic" folk songs, and Martha wonders whether he should be hired to invent "authentic" piety (Barnes 2012: 219). Nothing escapes reconstruction. Nothing except pain. Martha contemplates authenticity after the tête-à-tête with Dr. Johnson by reconsidering the folly of Pitman's endeavour – "if only it were true" (Barnes 2012: 219).

In Anglia, Dr Max the Historian's deep insight and labyrinthine answers are replaced by Mr. Mullin the Schoolmaster's swift and simplistic historical interpretations (Barnes 2012: 261). Yet the ease with which history can be written is again alluded to during the Fête (Barnes 2012: 266). However, nature regains authenticity in Anglia, and Martha appears to finally be at peace (Barnes 2012: 255).

Memory plays tricks on us, and we in turn play tricks on time. However, we play to win a game we are destined to lose. The present study has aimed to illustrate how Julian Barnes's characters seek to cheat time through counterfeiting memories and history. Martha attempts to snatch fleeting moments from the recesses of her mind in order to build character, yet discovers that "the human spirit should divide itself, between the entirely local and the nearly eternal" (Barnes 2012: 261).

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MASCULINITY AND HEROES

The Importance of Stories

Bucholz (1971: 39) believes that a thing most human beings have in common is their love for stories. This passion for hearing about the adventures of others develops from an early stage in one's life, namely from one's childhood. "Tell me a story" is a request most parents hear from their children when it's time for the little ones to go to sleep. Parents are used to telling a story to their offspring in order to help the child fall asleep faster. The expected question here would be "why do they want stories exactly?" and the answers to this are fairly straight-forward.

Hourihan (2005: 1) states that all cultures view stories as crucial. People have relied on stories when trying to explain different physical phenomena or when trying to describe human behaviour. Moreover, teachers use stories as educational tools for children find them enjoyable, vivid and easy to understand. Stories have a lot to teach us about "time and change, about cause and effect, and human relationships" (Hourihan 2005: 1). As a result, human beings rely on stories as a learning and growing experience, due to how accessible they are to all of us.

Another reason why children love stories is the "essential optimism" (Hourihan 2005: 1). This refers to how stories have the power to reassure children that there is a solution to be found for their problems. Nothing is without a solution and the problems can be solved. Children find comfort in stories and, more often than not, they keep asking for the same stories to be told to them, despite the fact that they already know the ending. They need to hear the same story, they need to be reassured that, even after facing villains and fighting battles, the hero shall be rewarded.

The most important argument in favour of telling stories is the fact that stories provide role models, namely heroes. Little children dream of one day being like their favourite literary character, more often than not picturing themselves as the heroes from different stories. Heroes shall be discussed in the following section, both from a traditional and from a modern point of view.

Heroes- Traditional and Modern Perspectives

A hero is a person who is admired for having done something very brave or having achieved something great. "The hero story has dominated children and young adult's literature, passing on the traditional values to each new generation" (Hourihan 2005: 3). Heroes are crucial, because children can look up to them and rely on them as role models. The hero is thought to be the good guy in the story. He fights the monsters

and the villains, which suggests that human beings who want to be heroes must fight all the bad forces that try to keep them away from finishing their mission.

According to Hourihan (2005: 2), from a traditional point of view, heroes have been associated with a quest, which is always the same. Legend, folk tales, children's stories and even thrillers for adults, all feature the same core of events. The story of Odysseus is essentially the same as that of Jason and the Golden Fleece, as Beowulf's, as the one of the Knights of the Round Table. As Le Guin (1993:8) points out heroes are traditionally male and the hero myth inscribes male dominance. There are exceptions that feature female heroes, but those are limited, thus making it obvious that heroism is biased towards men, not women. The male hero in these stories is always looking to complete his quest, to essentially prove that he is worthy of being a man.

Hourihan (2005:68) mentions that there is a recipe when it comes to traditional heroes. All the stories depict the hero's life as a series of struggles. For a hero, no victory shall ever be enough, due to another quest waiting for him around the corner. The hero can have no time for himself, because he is always fighting some monster or some villain. The final victory comes only at the finale, when the hero meets his 'happily ever after', a vague phrase indicating that the hero can finally rest, for he has completed his mission. What is essential for a hero is the fact that, over the course of the story, he manages to conceal his emotions, because emotions can cloud one's judgement, making him lose focus. Therefore, Hourihan (2005:68) points out, emotions are the real enemy of a hero and as result, they must be hidden. The myths impose this idea that heroes can show no emotion, for that would prevent them from fulfilling their destiny.

However, there is a shift in perspective once Modernism makes its presence felt. Modernism uses the traditional myths, but it toys with them, it twists and turns them, thus changing the way in which heroes are depicted. Kern (2011) explains this fluctuation in perspective by using the example of a letter written by James Joyce. In that letter, Joyce is basically saying that "the whole structure of heroism is, and always was, a damned lie" (Kern 2011). As a Modernist, Joyce is questioning the core of heroism, leading to his conclusion that everything that we had previously known was nothing but a lie, it was not the truth. Modernists "had to avoid the powerful clichés of men marching bravely into battle and dying heroically to defend their glorious country" (Kern 2011). They essentially stood away from the overused traditional story of the hero who sacrifices everything in order to defend his country. Despite that fact that modern heroes are nothing like their traditional counterparts, Kern (2011) mentions that they are not mere anti-heroes and that they are a new kind of heroes, with new qualities.

Olson (2017:253) notes that there are nontraditional representations of gender and sexuality that have become more visible in children's media. This is necessary for them, because it tells children that such identities exist and that they are as valid as the traditional ones. Götz, Neubauer and Winter (2012:107) agree that, in today's

society, not all heroes are portrayed according to the traditional sex-roles, but that there is a trend that should not be neglected. This trend is more visible when it comes to superheroes. They are usually male and they are shown to be more capable of holding positions of power and more able to save the world. Male heroes appear more often than female ones and they are depicted as more muscular, tougher and less likely to be emotional.

From all the traits that have been associated to heroes, the one this paper focuses on is masculinity. Aspects about masculinity shall be discussed in the following subchapter.

Masculinity

"Masculinity is the set of social practices and cultural representations associated with being a man." (Pilcher and Whelehan 2004: 82). This definition of masculinity draws attention to the fact that masculinity itself is a social and cultural construct. Therefore, the idea of masculinity is imposed by the society and by the cultural context one lives in. The "dramatic differences in the definitions of masculinity and femininity around the world" (Kimmel 2011: 58) only prove that there can be as many definitions for masculinity as one wishes. Each and every society has had its own beliefs when it comes to masculinity, starting from as early as one can remember.

Cartledge (1998: 54) mentions that, for the ancient Greeks, masculinity was associated with war, because war was believed to be exclusively the business of men. One can see that, beginning in Classical Antiquity, the general belief was that masculine men went to war and that one way in which they could prove their manliness was by fighting other people until one of them won. In addition to that, as Alston (1998: 205) has said, violence was an essential element when declaring masculinity, both when it came to one's public life, but also to one's private one. However, Kimmel (2011: 3) states that some cultures encourage men to prove their masculinity, while some other cultures are more relaxed when it comes to defining masculinity. This only adds to the fact that masculinity is a construct imposed by the society and not something that comes naturally to all those who identify as male.

Some studies in the past linked male homosexuality to the insufficient secretion of male hormones or "inadequate masculinity" (Kimmel 2011: 49). As a result, it was believed for a very long time, that masculinity could be associated with homosexuality as a real man could only feel sexual attraction towards women, not to his own gender. Therefore, these studies aimed to cure homosexuality by injecting more testosterone, the hormone mainly produced in the male body by the testicles. The paradox of these research studies was that men wanted indeed more sex, induced by the testosterone, just that they still wanted it to be with men, thus making it clear that there is absolutely no connection between masculinity and homosexuality. The

conclusion that can be drawn from here is that one man could still define himself as masculine, despite the fact that he felt attracted to other men only, never to women.

Sawyer (2004: 25) discusses the sex-role stereotypes, claiming that they are the ones who say that men should be dominant and that a man is successful if he can assert his superiority. Men are the ones who were designed to put food on the table, thus resulting in them not being able to be free or to show emotion. These would only put themselves between the man and his final aim: that of declaring his masculinity by fulfilling his social role. However, Sawyer (2004: 27) points out that, by accepting these conventional roles, the individual limits himself or herself, when he or she could do so much more by not staying inside the lines imposed by the stereotypical roles. The human being can only be free once it realizes that freedom knows no such notions as superior or inferior. Therefore, in order for men to achieve the best version of themselves, they need to free themselves of these socially dictated roles.

Overall, it should be noted that masculinity is a social and cultural construct that is defined according to the beliefs of a society. However, masculinity is not a clear concept. It can take many forms and one can see masculinity different from how the society sees it. The following section shall discuss two forms of masculinity, represented by two literary characters.

Percival

Percival is a character in absentia from Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*. An absent character, as the name probably suggests, he is one that is not present throughout the story. Due to Percival's absence, the reader needs the other characters, Bernard, Neville, Louis, Susan, Jinny and Rhoda, to provide multiple perspectives upon him. It needs to be taken into consideration that the six friends are all subjective when it comes to depicting Percival, so their ways of seeing things are more often than not biased.

In the novel, Percival is presented by the others as fulfilling the traditional masculine role. If one takes a look at his name, one realises that this character has the same name as the knight in the Arthurian legends. Sir Percival from the stories of King Arthur was brave and pure, eventually accomplishing the task of finding the Holy Grail. Therefore, the reader can expect the modern Percival in *The Waves* to try and find his own Holy Grail as well.

Just like the traditional heroes, Percival is described as beautiful, with a straight nose and blue eyes. He is heavy, so he has the considerable weight a strong hero would need when fighting his battles. Other than this, there is not much being said about his physical appearance, but it could be argued that it fits the desirable one for a hero. What is more important than how Percival looks like is his moral portrait, the way in which he acts.

People naturally gravitate towards Percival and he has this unique ability of bringing people together. Over the course of the novel, the six main characters barely

talk to each other. Instead, the text features long soliloquies, which are essentially those moments when the character is speaking to himself or herself. The characters are often lonely and selfish, not interacting much with each other. However, Percival manages to unite them, to create the climate in which all of them are together. It is their love for Percival that brings them together. Percival is the force that keeps them from falling apart, he is the substance that fills the voids in their souls.

Bernard, the spokesperson of the novel, literally describes Percival as a "hero" (Woolf 2015: 86). Bernard also mentions some children who troop after Percival and who try to blow their noses the way Percival does. This is all in vain, as Bernard says, simply because "he is Percival" (Woolf 2015:86), he cannot be imitated. Bernard compares himself and his friends to soldiers in the presence of their captain. It is clear that, even before joining the battlefield, Bernard assumes that Percival is blessed with the abilities of a leader, inspiring the people around to follow him. Everybody wants to be like Percival, but they all fail in being like him. No matter how hard one tries, one must come to terms with the fact that imitating Percival is not something one can achieve. Percival cannot be imitated, for he is unique.

The absent hero is usually focused on his own passions, his brain is concerned with "nothing but the match" (Woolf 2015:32). Percival is portrayed as a social animal with an appetite for sports, for activities that involve a lot physical strength. Neville, one of the male characters in the novel, is aware that Percival hates him for being too weak to play and for not caring whether the team wins, only if Percival himself cares about the victory. Neville cannot be persuaded to get involved in physical activities and he cannot be bothered to invest in the team's victory or failure. Neville is allowed to be physically weak, but the hero, Percival, must never show signs of weakness.

Despite the fact that they could not have less in common, Neville is deeply in love with Percival. Unfortunately, he cannot talk about his love for the absent character. Neville is painfully aware that Percival will forget him, that he will not reply to his letters and that he will not come if Neville were to ask him on a date. This is worthy of mention because, traditionally speaking, masculinity was not associated with homosexuality. If anything, homosexuals were thought to be feminine, even effeminate, so nothing like the traditional, desirable masculine role model. As a result of that, Percival rejects the affection of Neville (though it is not sure if he knows of Neville's feelings) and he seems to be fond of Susan, a female character, thus implying that masculinity involves identifying as heterosexual.

Just like the traditional heroes, Percival has to fulfill a mission and he is sent to India. Considering that he has the necessary qualities, his quest is expected be successful. However, Percival is thrown off the horse and dies. Normally, the readers expect heroes to die on the battlefield, with their sword in their hands, but our Percival receives a rather ironic and pathetic finale.

All in all, Percival from *The Waves* is said to fulfil the traditional expectations when it comes to masculinity. He has the looks of a hero, being physically strong, confident and inspiring others to wish they were like him.

Achilles

The Achilles this paper refers to is the one in Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles*. This is a postmodern retelling of Homer's *The Odyssey* so, naturally, it reshapes the already known myth of Achilles and that of the Trojan War. The novel is told from the point of view of Patroclus, the exiled prince who becomes a servant at the court of Achilles' father.

Achilles is a postmodern hero and he has traits that are not traditionally considered to be masculine. One important thing about Achilles is the fact he is described as having delicate, feminine features. When Odysseus and Diomedes are searching for Achilles in order to convince him to go to war, Achilles is hiding among the group of girls who serve the princess Deidameia. Due to his feminine features, Achilles can blend in with the girls, making it almost impossible for those at court to notice him. Therefore, Odysseus has to use a trick in order to find Achilles. Odysseus brings gifts to the ladies and among the "perfumes in delicate glass bottles stoppered with a bit of wax; mirrors with carved ivory for handles; bracelets of twisted gold; ribbons dyed deep in purples and reds" (Miller 2012:151) there were "leather-bound shields, carved spear hafts, and silvered swords with supple kidskin sheaths" (Miller 2012:151). Achilles tries his best to appear as a girl, dropping perfume on his slender wrists, but, when sensing danger, he picks up the weapons and gets ready to fight. This is what makes his cover fail, for Odysseus can now tell that one of the girls is actually a boy. Further on, Odysseus blackmails Achilles, saying that he shall tell others about Achilles as a girl. Patroclus notes that people reserved "their ugliest names for men who acted like women; lives were lost over such insults" (Miller 2012:154), suggesting that, if people were to find out about this, Achilles' reputation would be ruined. Thus, Achilles has no other choice but to join Odysseus to the battlefield.

Achilles, unlike traditional masculine heroes, does not have a wish to kill Hector, the Trojan prince. He always asks: "What has Hector ever done to me?" (Miller 2012: 230) when trying to motivate that he has little interest in fighting and eventually murdering his Trojan opponent. Traditional heroes perceive fighting as the perfect occasion for them to prove their masculinity, they are eagerly anticipating the final battle with the villain. However, Achilles does not want to kill people just to prove something if those people have done nothing wrong to him. Even Odysseus tells Patroclus that "[i]f you are truly his friend, you will help him leave this soft heart behind. He's going to Troy to kill men, not rescue them" (Miller 2012:195). It is obvious that Achilles is a kind man, one who does not want to hurt other people without having a good reason. However, Odysseus believes that Achilles' soft heart does not suit a masculine hero and it needs to be left behind. After all, a hero joins the battlefield in order to kill other soldiers, so no mercy can be shown.

Traditionally speaking, masculinity had been associated with heterosexual relationships, but modern and postmodern heroes challenge this aspect as well. Over

the course of the novel, Achilles is engaged in a homosexual relationship with Patroclus. More so, this makes one of the main focus points of the novel. The relationship between Achilles and Patroclus starts developing once Patroclus comes to live at the court of king Priam, Achilles' father. It is worth mentioning that Achilles does not care about the fact that Patroclus is nothing but a servant in Priam's kingdom. Achilles loves Patroclus deeply, hence he goes on a suicidal mission once Patroclus is dead. Achilles is aware of the prophecy which says that he shall die too once Hector is dead. However, he could not be bothered less by those magical words, for all he cares about is the fact that his beloved has died. Being in a relationship with a man does not make Achilles less of a masculine hero. The people respect and praise him, despite the fact that there is a man in his bed.

The postmodern depiction of Achilles challenges the traditional beliefs about masculinity and heroes. This novel arguably suggests that heroes can be delicate and kind-hearted, while still being warriors who join the battlefield.

Conclusions

In summary, this paper has argued that masculinity has multiple façades, not just the traditional one that associated men with muscles, absence of feelings and heterosexual relationships. The other side of masculinity, the one linked to Achilles, is one that should be discussed more, because children need role models that they can relate to, not stone-cold characters who sit on a pedestal and who are untouchable. At the end of the day, masculinity is a social construct, one that is biased towards traditional heroes, and little human beings should be encouraged to be themselves, no matter what the society dictates.

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THE FIGURE OF THE FEMALE ARTIST IN THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY: EDNA PONTELLIER'S JOURNEY TO PERSONAL AND ARTISTIC EMANCIPATION IN KATE CHOPIN'S *THE AWAKENING*

Published in 1899, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* came at a time marked by turbulent change which was to alter life as it was known to Americans: women were starting to seek their independence (Dyer 1993: 5) and *The Awakening* perfectly illustrates this quest of the nineteenth-century woman. The foundation of modern feminism was starting to be laid down, and as historian Mary Ryan has noted, "five million women would join the work force by 1900" (cited in Dyer1993: 5).

In *Women and Economics*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman (cited in Dyer 1993: 6) advocated for a change in women's behavior, saying they were to gain their own economic independence, "thereby improving their marriages and increasing their own humanity". Gilman, and Chopin, as well as many other women, saw fit that the domestic tradition surrounding the figure of the woman needed to be "re-examined," noting that

> Marriage is not perfect unless it is between class equals. There is no equality in class between those who do their share in the world's work in the largest, newest, highest ways and those who do theirs in the smallest, oldest, lowest ways. (Dyer 1993: 6)

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* is "unique in the canon of late nineteenth-century American literature." (Dyer 1993: 13), taking into consideration Edna's explicit refusal of the gender roles imposed on women at the time, thus shocking contemporary critics who described the novel as "morbid," "essentially vulgar," "gilded dirt" (Showalter 1988: 34). Given that Chopin's novel "went boldly and beyond the work of her precursors in writing about women's longing for sexual and personal emancipation" (Showalter 1988:34), it is hardly surprising that it was seen as vulgar and obscene by its contemporaries, as even Charlotte Perkins Gilman (cited in Dyer 1993: 13), one of the most radical voices of the 1890s was strongly and publicly against "female eroticism," considering that "excessive sex-indulgence" served only "to pervert and exhaust desire as well as to injure reproduction." It is for this very reason that Edna as a character comes across as an "unpleasant person" (Culley, cited in Malzahn 1991: 31), "a selfish adulterous woman for whom the author has failed to secure the reader's sympathy" (Malzahn 1991: 31).

With regards to artistic talent, most women of the nineteenth-century viewed it, as Germaine Greer (cited in Dyer 1993 :88) remarks in *The Obstacle Race: The Fortunes of Women Painters*, as "genteel accomplishment," a "pleasant pastime," and although many women had to pursue their artistic career out of material need, as Greer states,

not many of these women viewed the pursuit of such a profession as being "superior to a life of wedded bliss," which thus illustrates the extent to which gender stereotypes were woven into the fabric of the society: even those women who could choose to pursue such a career were hesitant to do so, perhaps because they themselves believed in the femininity ideals of the time, or merely out of fear; were they to pursue such a career, they would stand out and automatically be catalogued as female traitors, as rebels, anomalies. According to Mary Kelley (cited in Dyer 1993:88), "[t]he female vocation, then, was domesticity, in colonial as well as in independent America," and therefore, *The Awakening* is "more radical in its treatment of motherhood because it questions the assumptions that childbirth and child care are a woman's principal vocation, and that motherhood gives pleasure to all women" (Stone 1986: 23). By contesting this tradition, Chopin positions herself against the patriarchal system of the time, a system which had, and still has, at its core concepts and mechanisms meant to deprive women of one crucial thing that would allow them to reach individuation: the control over their own bodies (Stone 1986:23).

It is from this point of view that I want to explore Edna as the figure of the female artist in the nineteenth century. This paper takes a look at her artistic talent as it progresses, as well as to the way in which her awakening opens her eyes to the oppression suffered by women at the hand of the patriarchal institutions of the time; additionally, this paper asks the following question: to what extent can her awakening, personal and artistic, even take place in her contemporary society? As Katherine Kearns (1991: 62) so perfectly puts is, what exactly "does it mean for a woman to open her eyes to the non-domestic world of masculinely defined values?".

Edna's artistic life is at first experienced as a mere dabbling: "Mrs. Pontellier had brought her sketching material, which she sometimes dabbles with in an unprofessional way" (Chopin 1992: 21). However, soon enough, Edna commences to think of her painting as her work, a highly unconventional position for a woman to adopt in the nineteenth-century (Dyer 1993:85). However, Edna does not lack the talent, and this is clearly expressed in the narrative: "she handled her brushes with a certain ease and freedom which came not from a long and lose acquaintance with them but from a natural aptitude" (Chopin 1992:21; Stone 1986:26) Edna does not lack the typical self-criticism of the artist either: upon sketching a portrait of Adele Ratignolle and realizing that her work "bore no resemblance to Madame Ratignolle," "after surveying the sketch critically she drew a broad smudge of paint across its surface, and crumpled the paper between her hands." (1986: 21) Edna's failure to capture Adele in her work, a "sensuous Madonna, with the gleam of the fading day enriching her splendid colour" (1986: 21) indicates that it is highly possible that Edna's own awakening has not yet reached the point at which, having become aware of her own self, of her own sensuality, she is able to depict someone else's (Dyer 1993: 89).

We can also note here the character of Edna's work, which is based on imitation, and not on original creation, as she judges her art solely in relation to the similarity to the object, or subject, in this case, she wanted to depict. On the other hand,

it could be argued that Adele, the mother-woman, constantly reminds Edna "of her duty to her children", and thus, "she binds her [Edna] to society's rules and impedes her creative growth" (Stone 1986: 26).

From merely dabbling into the arts, upon returning home to New Orleans, the way in which Edna starts to perceive her work changes radically: what was previously a mere leisure activity is now Edna's "work" (Dyer 1986: 86), and the woman refers to her painting as such when conversing with other characters: **"**I believe I ought to work again. I feel as if I wanted to be doing something" (Chopin 1992: 105), "I've got to work when the weather is bright" (1992: 146). Chopin, too, refers to Edna's activity in the atelier as work (Dyer 1986: 86): "She was working with great energy and interest" (Chopin 1992:109). This conception of art as work, "in both the sense of difficult labor and one's true vocation was not prevalent among nineteenth-century women" (Dyer 1986: 86), and therefore we start to see Edna as the figure of the woman who, by choosing to dedicate herself to what she deems to be her work, transgresses the very notions of femininity of the nineteenth-century.

Edna is contrasted to Adele, a woman who plays the piano "to beautify her home and enrich the lives of her family" (Dyer 1986: 86-87). Meanwhile Edna's painting certainly does not have that effect, and Léonce, her husband, says so himself, "don't let the family go to the devil. There's Madame Ratignolle; because she keeps up her music, she doesn't let everything else go to chaos. And she's more of a musician than you are a painter" (Chopin 1992: 109). There is yet another difference between the two women's artistic performances: the instrument of artistic performance in Adele's case is positioned in her home in a way that benefits every member of the household. Edna, on the other hand, has her own atelier (Dyer 1986: 87); her art, then, "does not inhabit the domestic center" (Dyer 1986: 87). On the contrary, Edna's painting does not serve as a distraction only for her own domestic duties, but rather it seems that it interrupts the activity of the servants as well, as they all have to enter Edna's artistic sphere (Dyer 1986: 87), her atelier, "a bright room in the top of the house" (Chopin 1992: 109). In making the quadroon pose for her, the children are looked after by the housemaid, which in turn leads to the drawing room going undusted, and, when it is the housemaids's turn to sit, "no doubt, the work below stops altogether" (Dyer 1993: 87). It is not the form of art practiced by Adele that Edna wants to perform, but that of Mademoiselle Reisz, who "plays [...] with great feeling and art" (Stone 1986: 28) Listening to the woman, "Edna's passions are aroused" (Stone 1986: 28). For Edna, then, art is something truly personal, it is an escape of sorts, a means through which she is beginning to find her individuation.

Léonce embodies the values upheld by the nineteenth-century society with regards to women, and Edna embodies the exact opposite female persona, as her artistic work serves the opposite function to Adele's piano playing: Edna's work leads to her abandoning her Tuesdays at home: "She made no ineffectual efforts to conduct her household en bonne ménagère, going and coming as it suited her fancy, and, so far as she was able, lending herself to any passing caprice" (Chopin 1992: 108). To

Léonce, as well as to Edna's contemporaries, it seems "the utmost folly for a woman at the head of a household, and the mother of children, to spend in an atelier, days which would be better employed contriving for the comfort of her family." (1992: 108) Contrasting her husband, Robert, a "source of imaginative power" (Stone 1986: 26), he encourages Edna with "expressions of appreciation in French," and, as Carole Stone argues, while this may simply be flattery, "it is more encouragement than she has ever received from her husband" (Stone 1986: 26). Léonce expresses his disapproval of the activities undertaken by his wife in her atelier, which undoubtedly illustrates the double standards of the patriarchal society, as he himself has his own personal place, his office, to which he retreats when he needs a break from the domestic life (Dyer 1993: 87). Edna's disinterested attitude towards her family, her children, makes him wonder if Edna was not growing "unbalanced mentally" (Chopin 1992: 109). Edna not being a mother-woman, her desire for a different kind of life, a life of her own, definitely pointed towards something being wrong with her. Thus, along with Edna's artistic awakening comes her awakening to the patriarchal institution, and consequently to the male-imposed gender roles that she should abide by as a woman living in the nineteenth-century society.

Edna's artistic style changes just as her awakening progresses; from a work based on imitation, she gradually begins to paint in a more original and personal manner, and while she remains critical towards her art, the destructive episode from the beginning of the novel does not happen again (Dyer 1993: 91). Edna Pontellier's self-criticism can be understood in relation to the criticism received from those who should have supported her – her father, her sister, and her husband (Dyer 1993: 91). Still, despite all this, Edna has made up her mind about studying and pursuing art, and although she asks Madame Ratingolle for her opinion: "She knew that Madame Ratingolle's opinion in such a matter would be next to valueless, that she herself had no alone decided, but determined" (Chopin 1992: 105; Dyer 1993: 91). Laidpore definitely plays an important role in Edna's growing confidence in her work, as she herself says: "Laidpore is more and more pleased with my work; he says it grows in force and individuality. I cannot judge of that myself, but I feel that I have gained in ease in confidence" (Chopin 1992: 152; Dyer 1992 :92). Edna's last piece of work illustrates the changes that occurred in Edna, as we are told that she worked on this study without having the model in front of her; this should be contrasted with her earlier practice which always involved copying what was before her eyes (1992: 93).

Edna's fear of solitude is perhaps what holds her back from achieving the last stage of her awakening. It isn't until the last scene of the novel that she realizes, or brings herself to admit, that she is "absolutely alone" (Chopin cited in Dyer 1993: 93). Edna was warned by Mademoiselle Reisz that natural talent is not enough and that an artist must have "the courageous soul" (Chopin 1992: 120). We can associate the two women in Edna Pontellier's life, Adele Ratignolle and Mademoiselle Reisz, with the two possible endings for Edna: she could choose to follow Adele's example and renounce her emancipation, her awakening, by going back to her husband and her

children, thus forcing herself to become a mother-woman, or she could choose to be like Mademoiselle Reisz, whose "story suggests that Edna will lose her beauty, her youth, her husband, and children – everything, in short, but her art and her pride" (Showalter 1988: 47-48). Mademoiselle Reisz perfectly embodies the male-imposed stereotype of the independent female artist of the nineteenth-century: like other "nineteenth-century female artists, [such] as Emily Dickinson, [she] is unmarried, childless, eccentric in manner and in dress, and alienated from society" (Stone 1986: 28). In the end, in writing Edna, Chopin rejects both of these endings.

Edna is a witness to the birth of Adele's child, which makes her truly aware of what being a "traditional" woman is about, or rather what the society thinks a woman's role should be (Kaplon 2012: 1). Edna's feelings towards her children are made clear at various points in the novel, "She was fond of her children in an uneven, impulsive way. She would sometimes gather them passionately to her heart; she would sometimes forget them" (Chopin 1992: 36). Adele's words, "[t]hink of the children, Edna! Oh, think of the children! Remember them!" (Chopin 1992: 211), awaken Edna to the idea that her children will always remain a part of her, that they will always be linked, and the last thing Edna wants is to share her body with another being (Kaplon 2012: 2) as this would negate the entire process of her self-emancipation. The scene of childbirth, traditionally thought of as being "a woman's ultimate fulfilment" is described by Chopin as "a scene of torture" (Stone 1986: 30). Edna is driven to suicide, then, because she simply refuses to give herself up, as she stated when talking to Adele: "I would give up the unessential; I would give up my money, I would give up my life for my children; but I wouldn't give up myself. I can't make it more clear; it's only something which I am beginning to comprehend, which is revealing itself to me" (Chopin 1992: 90). To Edna, "[t]he children appeared before her like antagonists who had overcome her; who had overpowered and sought to drag her into the soul's slavery for the rest of her days" (1992:219).

In choosing to have Edna end her life by giving herself to the ocean, her story comes full circle: it was learning how to swim that gave Edna a source of empowerment, making her feel as if "some power of significant import had been given to her to control the working of her body and her soul" (Chopin 1992: 53). This new discovery of being in control of her own body prompted Edna to want more: "She wanted to swim far out, where no woman had swum before." (1992: 53). It is important that she wants to swim far out where no "woman" had swum before, and not reach a place that man had not reached. Although returning to the ocean makes sense in Edna's case as it can be seen as her returning to the first and only place where she felt utterly in control of herself, the question whether Edna's awakening is complete remains. In rejecting the two traditional endings for Edna, the ending of Adele Ratignolle and that of Mademoiselle Reisz, it is unclear whether Edna committing suicide is the way in which Chopin escaped the predictability of her end (Showalter 1988: 52). The ending, as Elaine Showalter (1988: 52) remarks, "seems to return Edna to the nineteenth-century female literary tradition, even though Chopin

redefines it for her own purpose," an ending which was all too familiar to Chopin's contemporaries, given that "drowning as the fictional punishment for female transgression against morality" was one of the preferred methods of the époque. According to Stone (1986: 30), "Edna drowns herself because she cannot live as a conventional wife or mother any longer, and society will not accept her newfound self," and because "she freely goes to the sea," she does lose her life as a consequence, "but she does not lose her self" (Jones cited in Stone 1986: 31). Having said this, however, "while the ending of the novel was realistic for its time, suicide as a resolution cannot satisfy women now" (Christ cited in Stone 1986); given and this cannot be ignored when trying to offer an interpretation of Chopin's novel through the lens of a twenty-first-century reader.

To conclude, while it is up for debate whether Edna manages to complete her awakening or not, there is no doubt that she embodies the figure of the female artist of the nineteenth-century. Although her journey is not ideal, her progress is not to be ignored: Edna's painting develops from a mere leisure activity, from "dabbling", as she starts to commit herself to this activity which ultimately becomes her work (Dyer 1993: 98). She acquires a new sense of herself, as well as new sense of herself as an artist, growing more confident in her work, which in turn begins to become more original. Patricia Lattin (cited in Dyer 1993: 98) states that *The Awakening* can be seen as illustrative of the late nineteenth-century, as it does notseek to offer an easy resolution to Edna's story, thus implying "that achieving selfhood is difficult, sometimes even impossible". Edna's story unfortunately represents a very likely ending for a woman and a female artist aware of the limitations imposed on her by the patriarchal society, and, even though it could be argued she never reaches the final point in this transition, by the end of the novel she is a different woman, as well as a different artist, from the one we see in the beginning of the novel at Grand Isle. According to Stone (1986: 31), "the triumph of *The Awakening* lies in Chopin's depicting, when others did not, the conflicts faced by women who wish to become artists. Courageously, she built in her novel a bridge from past to future so that women might find their way across."

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ESCAPING LANGUAGE THROUGH THE LANGUAGE *WRITTEN ON THE BODY*

The novel *Written on the Body* by Jeanette Winterson was published in 1992 when it instantly became a groundbreaking masterpiece that was to challenge both the structure of the novel and that of gender. "Why is the measure of love loss?" (Winterson 1992: 9) is the blunt entry in the novel, which may (mis)lead the reader to believe that the novel is about love above all else. Though the plot itself circles around love, namely the relationship between the nameless narrator and her/his lover Louise, the main concern of the novel resides in its sub-layer: the language. Through the latter, Jeanette Winterson manages to deconstruct and reconstruct notions such as novel and gender, both of paramount importance for the end of the nineteenth century.

Thus, the novel's outcome is a well-thought-out amalgamation of palimpsest, intertextuality, metadiscourse, and, above all, a narrator whose gender is undeclared. Love, however, becomes the vehicle through which all these structural elements are delivered in the novel. Winterson deconstructs the kind of clichéd love we are used to expressing, and finds a real and direct alternative to it: "You said, 'I love you.' Why is it that the most unoriginal thing we can say to one another is still the thing we long to hear? 'I love you' is always a quotation" (1992: 9). The entire subject of love has been verbalized so intensively and repeatedly that it is almost impossible to write anything new about it. Winterson uses language against itself. Still, due to the masterly genius of Winterson, language can be escaped through language, and love remains for her a powerful feeling that demands linguistic expression: "Love demands expression. It will not stay still, stay silent, be good, be modest, be seen and not heard, no. It will break out in tongues of praise, the high note that smashes the glass and spills the liquid" (1992: 9). It is almost like the biblical prayer to God in other tongues, where the language is so subjective and so greatly charged with praise that it can only be understood by the addressee: "And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire […] and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2: 3-4). It is not the language that is bare, but the standardization of language that renders it insignificant, as the narrator puts it: "It's the clichés that cause the trouble" (Winterson 1992: 9).

One of the most sophisticated, yet reliable tool that Winterson uses in rendering this story is the ungendered narrator. With this play on words, she manages to use language for concealing rather than revealing a character's identity. Of course, it could be argued that English as an uninflected language made it possible for her to explore this aspect of discourse, thus enabling her to write a critique on gender stereotypes through the subtle tool of a gender undeclared narrator. She accomplished the difficult task of using a first-person narrator without revealing his/her gender

throughout the novel. However, as Justyna Kostkowska (2013: 58) pertinently points out, to write an entire novel through the voice of an unnamed and ungendered narrator is not an accomplishable task in many languages. That is most certainly why translators faced many difficulties in giving the narrator a voice.

What makes this accomplishment all the greater is also the episodic intrusion of gender-oriented information that appeared to give away the identity of the narrator. Such intrusions are always counterbalanced by the reversed hint, hence the debate on gender remains open among literary critics. Though opinions are divided into those who argue narrator is male and those who claim s/he is female, the final conclusion, which I also agree with, is that Jeanette Winterson made it impossible to reach a final verdict regarding both the gender, and the sexual orientation of the narrator. There are several instances of such a leak of information regarding the narrator's gender, which at first give the impression of a breakthrough in deciphering his/her identity, but later on add even more to the layers of confusion the reader is facing. The narrator's discourse, commentaries, attire and even attitude give misleading hints as to what s/he might be. Once, talking about their previous relationship with Inge, the narrator discloses an episode at the urinals where s/he made the following comment:

> My job was to go into the urinals wearing one of Inge's stockings over my head. That in itself might not have attracted much attention, men's toilets are fairly liberal places, but then I had to warn the row of guys that they were in danger of having their balls blown off unless they left at once. (Winterson 1992: 18)

The fact that s/he has to wear a stocking in the urinals could be an indication of the narrator actually being a woman, while also talking about guys as *the other* points out to the exact same thing. Also, when the narrator is trying to make sense of the relationship between love and sexual intercourse, or better still of what s/he had previously experienced in love and how it differed from what s/he felt for Louise, s/he makes a small but remarkable comment about his/her condition: "Why do I feel like a convent virgin?" (1992: 69), which is yet again an example of feminine disclosure.

Such instances of possible feminine identity are counterbalanced by indications of male features at times. While confronting Jacqueline about his/her affair with Louise, the narrator refers to him or herself as an "arsehole," a vulgar slang word usually assigned to men: "THINGS HAD CHANGED, what an arsehole comment, I had changed things" (1992: 43). Also, when the narrator knocks down Elgin after his/her return to London, which is a mark of masculine strength, s/he puts his head on a pillow to make sure that he is comfortable until the ambulance arrives. The latter attitude is an example of feminine care and empathy. There are also more confusing instances where both features are attributed to the same person: "When I saw you two years ago I thought you were the most beautiful creature male or female I had ever seen" (1992: 62).

With her constant play on revealing and concealing through language, Winterson engages in a process of reconstructing the structure of the novel, employing

various strategies with which she manages to make it new. She controls the language system, inasmuch as she limits the use of personal pronoun to conceal her narrator. At the same time, the first part of the novel offers a very ambiguous image of the plot, as the narrator uses the second person singular to address a potential lover who is yet to be revealed to the reader. We are given information that can only be clarified later in the novel. Thus, not only does she manipulate the chronology of the novel but also the distribution of information about her characters. Jeanette Winterson made it her endeavor to reshape the traditional novel before it was completely dying. Her nameless ungendered narrator served to open a new space and to render the text transformative. She often speaks of the novel as a place of reinvention:

> We are our own inventions — at least we ought to be — because if we do not invent ourselves, someone else will invent us — If we resist the new space the text leads us into, we will recede into the other, familiar prison of certainties and dualities. (Fau cited in Kostkowska 2013: 60)

Therefore, she anticipates the reader's possible reluctance to read a text that appears misleading in many regards. There is the intentional "I" which Jennifer Hansen describes as "faceless," and thus the narrator cannot be defined or objectified: "because we cannot generate a concept that distinguishes us from this character […] we are invited to occupy the space of the protagonist ourselves. We begin to experience the beloved and loving as the protagonist [the narrator] does" (Hansen cited in Kostkowska 2013: 60). At first, this lack of clarification regarding the narrator can be a source of confusion, but what Hansen points out is that this apparently vacant place is also left for the reader to occupy, hence giving them a different reading experience with a different kind of novel.

Also, within the latter stage of the reading experience, where the reader steps into the shoes of the nameless narrator, there is yet another aspect worth mentioning. After the initial feeling of uneasiness is experienced in front of a gender undeclared narrator, the reader's focus may shift from the tiresome effort of finding clues about him/her to a place of "gender suspense," as Justyna Kostkowska observes (2013: 59), where the stereotype of the gender dualism is destabilized, and the focus finally becomes the traumatic and dilemmatic experiences of the narrator. It is a reading experience that has the potential to trigger multiple perspective shifts.

As the title bluntly suggests, *Written on the Body*, writing the body is another instance of great language exploration, where the concrete physicality of the body intertwines with the abstract body of language. It deals with both textuality (written), and sexuality (body), which opens the controversial debate on the perception of the body (Makinen 2005: 117). The middle section of the novel is crafted in such a way as to draw the attention towards the body and the language written on it. If the first part presented no special division on a structural level, the middle section contains short chapters entitled "The Cells, Tissues, Systems and Cavities of the Body," "The Skin,"

"The Skeleton" and "The Special Sense." This could also be interpreted as Winterson's rejection to categorize, and anatomize love and desire, which are mostly detailed in the first half of the novel (Wiel 2014: 40).

Language is particularly important for this section, as it merges the poetic register of fiction with the pragmatic clinical language of anatomy. The motivation behind such an experiment is particularly remarkable – the attempt to recover the lost lover by calling parts of her body in a clinical form, adorned with erotic language and imaginings (Makinen 2005: 113). In an attempt to unify the two registers of discourse, I venture to call Jeanette Winterson's experiment of the middle section of the novel an anatomical writing of love. What is also interesting to remark is how both the narrator (the lover), and Elgin (the husband) exercise a form of control upon Louise. If the latter studies her body through a scientific lens, the former engages in the process of recovering the body through language and memory. What the narrator does through the invocation of Louise's body is another form of invasion, thus replacing that of cancer (Makinen 2005: 113). Though it may be argued that the narrator's depiction of the body is through an object-like image of Louise, the merging of body and language is an escape hatch for the romantic attempt to actually transubstantiate the body, and transform it into a living experience (2005: 114). Winterson's desire to constantly reinvent form is noticeable on this level of discourse, where she yet again rejects a certain form of language and engages in creating her very own medical vocabulary embedded with poetic and stylistic marks. As Gregory Rubinson (2001: 223) pertinently points out, "[m]edical science explicates the body in terms of its components and mechanical processes, but Winterson depicts its inevitable failure to treat the individual holistically." The author manages to erase that failure through the enrichment of such vocabulary with the fusion of fictional forms.

Last but not least, another prominent trait of language is its capacity to reflect on itself, to rewrite itself, and to mix various discourses. Therefore, in *Written on the Body*, Jeanette Winterson employs the technique of metadiscourse to present a vivid language, always fluid and moveable. Because language is the core of the novel, it would be only natural to have instances where the narrator ponders upon the sheering and transforming power it has. In order to do so, not only does Jeanette Winterson perform a beautifully and carefully crafted play on words but she also often presents a language that generates itself and the world. There are several instances where, like in the Bible, word materializes:

> Sweating and delirious, her head twisting from side to side, she could only repeat over and over again the single word ELGIN. Esau, drawn and down at heel, twisting his prayer shawl beneath his black coat, had a superstitious side. If that were his wife's last word then surely it should mean something, become something. And so the word was made flesh. Samuel became Elgin and Sarah did not die. (Winterson 1992: 26)

As a consequence, the word become flesh – Elgin is born – and it also has a redeeming aspect – Sarah escapes death. What is more, language has the capacity to distort one's reality or to generate a new one:

> Why do human beings need answers? […] Try standing in front of a class and asking what is the capital of Canada. While you wait in the silence, absolutely the victim, your own mind doubts itself. What is the capital of Canada? Why Ottawa and not Montreal? (1992: 11)

Absence of language can often be mistaken for a reconfiguration of reality. Thus, Winterson awakens the reader to a reality where language, perhaps more than anything else, possesses the power to alter and generate our lived experience.

The novel *Written on the Body* is also a veritable example of intertextuality. It is present in more than one form: Jeanette Winterson creates a complex merging of literary references, technological terminology and geographical imagery. Firstly, there is the link between *Written on the Body* and other literary works that embrace the discussion on language. The beginning of the novel offers us the famous line uttered by Caliban from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*: "You taught me language and my profit on't is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you for learning me your language." (1992: 9), which makes the direction of the novel clear, namely language and otherness. T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* is also present at the beginning of the novel, where the description of landscape depicts a dying nature that anticipates Louise's decaying body (Maioli 2009: 146): "It hasn't rained for three months. The trees are prospecting underground, sending reserves of roots into the dry ground, roots like razors to open any artery water-fat" (Winterson 1992: 9). Furthermore, the observant gaze of the unnamed narrator over his/her lover's body takes us back to the metaphysical poets who decomposed into fragments the subjugated female body. (Maioli 2009: 145). From here, the association of Louise's body and geographical imagery is very prolific and abundant. There is this idea of the exploration of the body and the final arrival at the plentiful land:

> Eyes closed I began a voyage down her spine, the cobbled road of hers that brought me to a cleft and a damp valley then a deep pit to drown in. What other places are there in the world than those discovered on a lover's body? (Winterson 1992: 60-61).

To conclude, the depth of Jeanette Winterson's artistry and innovation is visible in *Written on the Body.* Her oeuvre is a veritable example of her desire to build a novel on idiosyncratic elements that make it original. I showed how secondary elements took center stage in the novel, and how the reader would feel a sense of uneasiness while reading it. Thus, it becomes an element of initiation for anyone willing to regard the novel as a vivid generator of new forms, championing new values. The metaphor for her writing can be depicted from the text itself: "Louise's tastes had no place in the late twentieth century where sex is about revealing not

concealing. She enjoyed the titillation of suggestion" (Winterson 1992: 50). Winterson's writing is embroidered with symbolic and suggestive meanings that have no functioning for the rushed gaze of a resigned reader.

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ON MATERIALITY AND MEMORY: AN ANALYSIS OF BERNARDINE EVARISTO'S *GIRL, WOMAN, OTHER* (2019)

Shortly after its release, one of its ardent critics described Evaristo's work as a "big, busy novel about the new ways of living" (Garner 2019). Such a remark perfectly introduces the multicultural sensitivity present in the novel, where identity – artistic, cultural, familial – is slippery, and the interconnections migrate from the twelve main characters towards the memory of the African diaspora in order to strengthen the fact that the human body is not a stable entity, but rather a porous one, with a constant interchange between the characters and the surroundings. As the novel is written in verse type narrative, one can find encapsulated not only webs of relationships set across time and characters, but also emotions and dramatic spaces, questioning the infinite maps of the material world. What the characters presumably do, is to express their sense of belonging both as mixed race subjects and as women, unconsciously tracing the agential nature of objects, as well as their mnemonic functions.

Taking heed of these particularities, this paper examines aspects such as memories, visual appearance, language and vibrant sights of the city, seeking to prove that the environment fails the presumptions of an inert, empty space, but rather offers a fertile ground for analyzing the interchanges and interconnections between the inanimate forms and animate bodies. In the first part of my analysis, I will explore the posthumanist materialist perspectives belonging to Karen Barad, Stacy Alaimo and Jane Bennet whose arguments for the vibrancy of the matter and an inseparability of the human materiality from the man-made worlds, whereas in the second part I will proceed in applying the aforementioned concepts to the text itself, and everything will be followed by final remarks.

In an attempt to come to a theoretical approach, it is necessary to mention that "new materialism" questions the agency of objects, neglecting their apparent inert properties and thus finding importance in the psychological reactions of the human mind. In her analysis of the agential realist understanding of matter, Barad stresses the process of materialization for "reconfiguring the material-social relations of the world" by taking into consideration the dynamic and contingent materialization of space, time, bodies, as well as "the incorporation of material-discursive factors (including gender, race, sexuality, religion, nationality, technoscientific and natural factors)" (Barad 2007: 35). On a similar note, feminist theorist Stacy Alaimo claims that we inhabit what she refers to as "trans-corporeality" envisioned as a space where human materiality is inseparable from the natural and man-made worlds.

This window onto our constant exchange with what surrounds us, encouraged Barad to look at the world in a new way: "agential realism". Drawing on philosophers such as Judith Butler and Donna Haraway, Karen Barad investigates the

ontological definitions of Niels Bohr's on quantum physics. Her perspective brings forth this challenging domain, but her definitions have an ample role in establishing our relationship with the environment and in defining how we, as humans, should interact with it. Whilst questioning the concepts and theoretical approaches to science, Barad sees that in matters of agential realism our perceptions of exterior stimuli do not reflect concepts similar to what science tends to offer at a first glance, but rather they offer real, concrete reactions the subjects receive as truth. In fact, she advocates for an "entanglement" of the matter through which she suggests that subjects and objects (seen as "agencies of observation" and, respectively, "objects of observation") exist in a continuous state of interdependence ("intra-relating").

With the aforementioned theoretical insights, Jane Bennet defines the vibrancy of the matter. As the author suggests, "[a] life names a restless activeness, a destructive-creative form-presence that does not coincide fully with any specific body. A life tears the fabric of the actual without ever coming fully 'out' in person, place, or thing" (Bennet 2010: 54). This acknowledgement is brought to life from a conative concern for human comfort and harmony in the environment, strengthening, therefore, the encounter between "people-materialities" and "thing-materialities". Moreover, Bennet suggests our materiality by emphasizing Vladimir Ivanovich Verndalsky: "We are walking, talking minerals," (2010: 11) and the importance remains in the synapses, in the communication between the two materialities with their projection on the human mind, reflected in our attachment to them.

As a pure, honest writer, with an overflowing lucidity, lyricism and freedom, Bernardine Evaristo is the artist that strives to observe how and why novels fulfil deep needs in humanity. Her works seem to explore what it means to live in a multicultural community, oftentimes seeking to portray the multiplicity of black British women, depicting them in every aspect society. In fact, Evaristo's starting point was to define and encourage responsibility so that people will know when to stand against injustice and how to implement plans of action: "people need to look at themselves, at their organizations, and then they need to see where they stay in terms of inclusivity and diversity" as she declares in an interview for Channel 4 News (2020). It has often been noted that multiculturalism stratifies and compartmentalizes ethnic identity, an aspect displayed as a difficulty to integrate into the community. In *Girl, Woman, Other,* the stories develop an entire web of interconnections set across twelve main stories, preponderantly women of colour, and depicted over a significant period of time. Evaristo is the author who continuously forges the link between past and present, depicting the nomadic nature of nowadays man and the necessity to build a society in which multiple cultures are respected and assimilated.

The characters irradiate the memories of their place through numerous descriptive passages, but oftentimes they manage to transcend reality and open other worlds with "labyrinthine tunnels," whose "hotspots" Dominique seems to be familiar with as she remembers being a guide around the city of London for her friend Nziga. Similarly, Carole highlights the mnemonic function of the Liverpool station

which enables her to think about "final destinations". In other words, these two characters are estranged from the community and they seem to construct identity in communion with sights of the cities they live in, with the spiritual benefits they might gain from their closeness to sounds, news, even being able to recognize special places and share them with others. However, as this paper aims to argue, by participating in what Jane Bennet calls the "vibrant matter," Dominique and Carole's behavior opens up a space of recognition with the materiality that surrounds them, and also activates a sense of awareness shared and investigated within the human and non-human others.

The section when Carole remembers memories from childhood clarifies her interest in becoming acquainted as much as possible with the place she lives in: "when icy particles hang off the illuminated green and gold of Hammersmith Bridge with its eerily glowing towers and heraldry / she runs for her life […] she was a child at that time, how could those beasts have done that to her? How could she have blamed herself when she was so blameless?" (Evaristo 2019:127). The same is tru in the case of Dominique, who in dialogue with Amma, realizes that she loves Britain, "although less so every time I return, it's become a living memory for me, it feels in the past, even when I'm in its present." (Evaristo 2019:448). Hence, their fragile, insecure identities and vibrant personalities highlight the fact that the city itself, as well as the places of their personal growth, are actually co-participants, mediums through which most of their memories gain form and life. The challenges of alterity would include understanding the human self in such a way that the "other," even the one in the title of the novel participates in the equation. In fact, the city itself becomes one of the most important nonhuman entities the characters become interconnected with, as the author points out,

> With all my books I'm interested in where people come from in relation to who they are […] When I was in my 20s and started discovering more about my own history, it was mind-blowing to discover there had been Africans in Britain during the Roman occupation […] It's very important to know the alternatives to mainstream history, as we're not represented in it. To discover how deep our roots are, is important. Those of us who are older are living history, and I feel we have a duty to share it. footnote guardian past, and encourages a reinforcement of the selfhood in communion with them. (Evaristo 2020)

Drawing on from the previous thoughts, Carole's first day of university opens up a whole new world, one that exceeds her expectations, specifically because of the reduced number of brown people present there. On her arrival, she has to make multiple encounters with various means of transport such as the bus, the tube, numerous crowds, ultimately realizing that her mother would be of no help in such a situation due to her outstanding behavior as "she'd wear her most outlandish Nigerian outfit consisting of thousands of yards of bright material, and a headscarf ten storeys high" (Evaristo 2019:121). What stands out are her emotional reactions to

the obstacles she meets on the way to university: the bus, her luggage, her mother's image, or objects that are invested with the function of intruding her thoughts.

But going back to the first character mentioned, Dominique, I will further analyze how trauma forces the character to offer a linguistic irrepresentability. Cathy Caruth's argues that trauma pushes the victim towards a relentless re-enactment of interior emotional turmoil. In this repetition, Dominique knows every part of the city, but also engages with the food she eats, mapping out and commingling physical sensation with mental perception, solid matter with bodily fluid, and exterior entities with personal perceptions, because while drinking her cup of coffee her mental perception pushed her to feel guilty "about the rubbish she was putting into her body – abusing it" (Evaristo 2019: 73). Moreover, Amma, the character who is molded after the author herself, finds connections between the physical sensations and mental perceptions when she admires the river "as she feels the warm smoke travel down her oesophagus soothing her nerves while trying to combat the adrenaline rush of the caffeine." (Evaristo 2019: 11). These invisible linkages indicate what Jane Bennet sees as a presence of composite vitality:

> The vitality of (nonhuman) bodies? By "vitality" I mean the capacity of things – edibles, commodities, storms, metals – not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to acts as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own. My aspiration is to articulate a vibrant materiality that runs alongside and inside human. (Evaristo 2019: viii)

Language itself is decorated with traces of materiality whose intersectionality indicate the multifaceted model of linguistic representation within webs of materiality. When listening to her friend's accent, Dominique's senses bring to light "warm, cornbread, sticky ribs, gumbo, jambalaya, collard greens, crackin' cabbage, peanut brittle – and other foods she's read about in novels by African-American women" (Evaristo 2019: 73). On a closer analysis, the representation of language acts as a complex linkage between the visible form and its materiality, an aspect common to Carol as well, who analyses carefully her classmates' accents and their gestures. In this sense, when analyzing the vital materialism, Jane Bennet claims for an abandonment of human agency pleading the force that resides within nonhuman entities:

> Why advocate the vitality of matter? Because my hunch is that the image of dead or thoroughly instrumentalized matter feeds human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption. It does so by preventing us from detecting (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling) a fuller range of the nonhuman powers circulating around and within human bodies. These material powers, which can aid or destroy, enrich or disable, ennoble or degrade us, in any case call for our attentiveness, or even "respect." (Bennet 2010: ix)

One common characteristic which gathers the characters' sensitive apprehension of the world where humans, alongside animate and inanimate others intermingle, is rather conveyed in the characters' compartmentalization of the environment around them not only by in-depth knowledge of the places and its inhabitants, but also in numerous times through the colors and the symbolical interpretations that reside within them. For instance, an emblematic moment occurs when Nziga decides to understand the superstitions that stand behind the spectrum of the color black when she takes into consideration the racial implications of "stepping on a black doormat rather than over it, of not wearing black socks, and don't ever use black garbage bags" (Evaristo 2019: 78). For Waris, the symbolism of the colors is reflected in the correspondences established at the psychological level when the character claims that "she has green days, brown days, blue days, floral days, fluorescent days – never black days" (Evaristo 2019: 53). The colors also serve as an identity shortcut for the two women, as they find themselves caught in a circle where the agential nature of the symbols intermingles with their imagination and they face difficulty in comprehending it. This explains both their awareness of the objects and the places around them, as well as the image they expose in front of others in order to make statements about their identities (be it Muslim or Black).

The above examples led me to further investigate the physical characteristics which seem to be important in the work, seeking not only to suggest the landscape that opens in front of the reader but also its role in emphasizing the memory of objects. Defined by specific features and trying to fit in the host communities, clothing items and hairstyles become particularities that impel our characters to seek adequate alternatives to their traditions. The topic brings forward both the material objects and memories of home, aspects that Marschall analyzes in depth when he emphasizes the importance of personal belongings that "elicit deliberate or involuntary memories of homeland, home culture" (2019: 2). Amma raised her daughter to be free-spirited, specifically by allowing her to wear clothes based on her preferences. Furthermore, Carole defies the rules of the city "in her perfectly-tailored city clothes, the balletic slope of her shoulders, straightened hair scraped back into a martial topknot, eyebrows plucked with calligraphic flair" (Evaristo 2019: 109).

The hairstyles represent a dichotomy between the girls that are encouraged to be themselves, as in Yazz's case, a way of displaying confidence, on the one hand, and, on the other, Carole, or Meghan, who try to hide their true identities, seeking to obtain the required perfection in order to blend in. However, as my analysis aims to argue, such delicate and personal particularities highlight their agency in that they "trigger emotional responses and stimulate social effects and actions" (Gell cited in Marschall 2019: 2), ultimately evoking responsibility through the feelings, emotional reactions, as well as the spiritual engagement that stirs the decision making. Moreover, they reinforce a sense of belonging, establishing a sense of home through a necessary redefinition of personal and social identities.

Amma's utterly irreverent stance on the surfeit of a hypertrophied museal memory comes to the fore every now and again when she pictures that "home was a derelict factory in Deptford with concrete walls, a collapsing ceiling and a community of rats that defeated all attempts at extermination" (Evaristo 2019: 20). When remembering home, Amma opens up a discussion about "other spaces," one that arranges time in an archive, intending to display how engaged she is with her previous home, with its objects that are meant to structure and create order in her knowledge of the past, even though the interpretation might be the fruit of a wrong perception. By commemorating her previous home, she emphasizes the "ability of objects to communicate meaning" (Conn 2010: 25), projected in the present moment as a nomadic character who "moved into a series of similarly squalid squats until she found her herself living in the most desirable squat in the whole London, as Soviet-sized former office block at the back of King's Cross" (Evaristo 2019: 20). Furthermore, the two stages could highlight what various scholars have argued when analyzing the role of objects in fostering nostalgia and recreating a sense of home in the context of migration, especially in the context of 'home-building' through the numerous affective blocks or 'homely' intimations, by shaping the environment, as Amma's ultimately finds out "she was lucky enough to be one of the first to hear of it before it filled up" (Evaristo 2019: 20). The way she experiences the memory of her previous home, reveals her alertness to the role of objects and their porosity, depicted as repositories of memory. Clovis and Shirley enter the same category by keeping names in their souls. Clovis, for instance, enumerates a list of memories just by naming cities: "we travelled through places with beautiful names I wrote down and memorized: Looe, Polperro, Fowey, Mevagissey, St Mawes, Falmouth, St Keverne, the Lizard, Mullion, Porthleven," (Evaristo 2019: 232) or, Shirley who is determined to remember the names of each of her students:

> as she calls out the register when each class comes into her room that day, determined to quickly memorize their names, knowing the importance of a teacher's personal touch to establish rapport / Danny, Dawna, Decima, Devonne, Doreene, David Janet, Jenny, Jackie, Jazil, Chris, Mark, Monica, Matthew Rosemary […] Jules, Julie, Juliette, Beverley, Brenda, Chaz, Maz, Rory Remi, Yemi, Abi, Aarti, Eddie, Carlton, Kingley, Shabnam. (Evaristo 2019: 202)

Such lists of places and names, or in other cases objects, abound in Rachel and Shirley's lives and it is quite remarkable that the material they deliberately choose for recording their experiences is not a diary, which would perfectly arrange the names of the cities or the students, but rather their memory. It is, in fact, an unstable archive within which subjects are connected, and thus emphasize the human mind as one that has traces of the otherness, one that responds to the nonhuman and exists in relation to it. This, coupled with many other episodes in which characters start establishing connections not only with names of people but also places, by engaging with the materiality of the environment, speaks to the entangled agency of things that can

foster in humans a yearning to activate living memory of genuine intersubjective relations.

On the whole, the pattern of intra-activity the novel encompasses echoes Latour's take on the distributed agency as a notion of the entwinement of humans and nonhumans. He claims that "by traversing these networks, we do not come to rest in anything homogeneous. We remain, rather, within an infra-physics" of heterogeneity (Latour 1993: 128). In Evaristo's novel, as the narrator confesses about Yazz, "[her] mind is her most valuable asset" (Evaristo 2019: 52), it almost literalizes Latour's definition of the non-modern, with its twofold impulses of separation and translation, of division and hybridization. Similar to Michael Longley's poems, or even more remarkable in Seamus Heaney's object poems, the novel reflects Stacy Alaimo's definitions, or Barad and Bennet's ones, regarding agency as materially distributed in intra-active entanglements which transforms the object into the vibrant matter. The web of connections set among humans and nonhumans questions the ethical implications that inevitably emerge due to the need to coexist responsibly with others in the multi-textural materiality of the world. These concepts are analyzed in Heaney's prolific set of poems "Station Island" where he ingeniously uses objects to illustrate the poet's responsibility to the sectarian violence settled during the Northern Irish Troubles, because as he says: "The Sense of the Past," where he shows that "the ghost-life that hovers over the furniture of our lives significantly amplifies our consciousness. […] The more we are surrounded by such objects and are attentive to them, the more richly and connectedly we dwell in our own lives" (Heaney 1993: 33).

Through such a reading of Bernardine Evaristo's work, I have proved that objects have agency and possessions develop mnemonic functions. The paper has further illustrated the author's attempt to display aspects related to home intermingled with past and present, visual appearance, narrative or objects that evoke attachment, encouraging in this way to analyze and demonstrate the need for ethical implications. Finally, I have proved that memory, when it re-vitalizes the past, can make a fundamental contribution in historical studies. Alert to the vibrant materialities of the British landscape and through the manifold sites reactivated throughout the characters' interconnection, the female characters from *Girl, Woman, Other*, rediscover identity, and, as this paper has shown, the recollective potential of objects can encourage a re-emplacement of the human self within the complex network of animate and inanimate others.

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RELIGION IN ELIZABETHAN DRAMA: SHAKESPEARE AND MARLOWE

It seems easy to forget now, but there was once a time in history when religion and literature had everything to do with each other. Specifically, in the Elizabethan age, not merely one confession, but multiple doctrines vied for control, with literature there to preserve their clashes. Although England had been, by Queen Elizabeth's reign, formally Protestant for quite a while, it would be a misconception to consider Catholicism on the verge of collapse, as the latter permeated every level of societal hierarchy, despite its adherence being punishable by death: "the Church of England was structured in countless ways by its Catholic past" (Shell 2010: 5). Even with censorship in full control of the few playhouses of the Elizabethan times, literature still prevailed in portraying the infinitely complex religious context of its unique era, and that is owing to the subtle doctrinal divergences of the two confessions which few individuals were apt to distinguish, let alone ban. Admittedly, there are obviously Catholic endeavors, such as relying on the institution of the Church for mediation between man and God, the same way there exist Protestant recourses to sola Scriptura, yet they are not the direction in which this paper will advance. Instead, I shall focus on the rather "fluid … religious and ethical beliefs" (Eliot 1932: 49), which eluded censorship yet so deeply affected the manner in which Shakespeare, Marlowe and so many others wrote their plays. In order to do that, a brief overview of Catholicism as opposed to Protestantism will be provided, so that when we eventually delve into Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595) and Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* (1604), the extent to which religion fundamentally shapes these plays is better understood.

The history of Catholicism is as broad on a chronological scale as it is deep in its ethical structure. It would be grossly reductive to believe that there is just one universal set of principles which can be used to broadly define the religion, as, demonstrably, every couple of centuries, groundbreaking shifts occur in every human endeavor. Yet it is equally true that some sources are vastly more influential for the Elizabethan era than others. As such, the Catholicism which I shall analyze and bring to light in Elizabethan drama is specifically that of St. Augustine of Hippo. Few Fathers of the Church have had their legacy upkept so intact, and to that we owe Augustine's tendency towards classical philosophy in a time when classicism was highly sought after – the Renaissance. His sense of Catholicism obsessively revolved around three fundamental topics - Providence, free will and the problem of evil – all of which Augustine tackles in "a hopeless effort to preserve the unity, omnipotence and goodness of God" (Eliade 1994: 53, my translation). This we see present in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries through the Elizabethan World Picture, manifested through Order and Degree and "built around the central tenet of

teleological design" (Dollimore 2004: 6). Augustine goes on, faithful to Plato and Aristotle, to maintain that man himself, being a creation of God, naturally tends toward goodness, and that "evil-doing is nothing but running away from teaching" (Augustine 2010: 4). Evil does not exist, then – it is merely the absence of good. He further advocates for the importance of free will by reminding us that virtue is only significant if it is consciously chosen over vice; morality is directly connected to and can only exist in the presence of free will. Finally, he reconciles divine omniscience and omnipotence with the absolutely unimpeded sentience of man: "Unless I am mistaken, you would not force someone to sin as a result of foreknowing that he is going to sin" (Augustine 2010: 80). Providence is inherently good, man himself partakes in divinity, has complete agency and all his vices are naught if not ignorance. With this in mind we move on to scrutinize Protestantism.

It is embedded, even into its very name, that Protestantism should stand against something. Therefore, it seems only natural that, even though they retain many similarities to other Christian doctrines, Protestants ought to be judged chiefly by what they contest. And if we are to further reduce the field of inquiry to those theological aspects which are of interest when assessing Elizabethan drama, the points of contention turn out to be none other than the previously mentioned Augustinian ones: Providence, free will, and evil. This coincidence can be explained by noting that Calvinism borrowed from Augustine's philosophy perhaps as much as Catholics did, yet to utterly different ends. When it comes to Providence and free will, "a standard Protestant premise" was "that salvation and reprobation are entirely in God's gift, and not affected by man's endeavors" (Shell 2010: 129), which necessarily entails that Providence can, in fact, inflict harm. One can notice here a shift in responsibility for human actions. Virtue, vice, none belong to us since God is almighty and everything must be under His control (*sola gratia*). It becomes evident how, gradually, the notion of free will no longer make sense in religious contexts. This Dollimore terms, in *Radical Tragedy*, "the decentering of man" (2004: 150-247).

In an age when people sought more enjoyable lives, Protestantism took away moral responsibility in exchange for freedom to some extent. The consequences of said freedom were that man could no longer be considered to share in God's divinity. No longer was man supposed to rekindle the virtues which were naturally given to him. Instead, people were weak, ignorant, entirely at the mercy of God and, most importantly for us, subject to evil. In the Protestant belief, evil is not the absence of good, but a separate, powerful influence which would encroach man. Providence is at times tyrannical; man does not have complete agency and evil exists. Comparing this to the previously mentioned Augustinian principles, we now begin to look at Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The approach employed will be from general to particular, in that we shall first observe the play's overarching structure and then proceed to closely analyze the first and last acts. Considering this method, the best place to start is Northrop Frye's work. In *The Myth of Deliverance* (1993), he writes: "In a tragedy, an action […] may be,

through a reversal of action, suddenly perceived as a parabola, an action turning downward […] In a comedy there is normally a reversal upward …" (4). He proceeds to examine at length in his book the recurring patterns in both comedy and tragedy which strive to rekindle balance in the imagined universe. We see how, in the very structure of most drama, there is a guiding hand which never fails to lead towards the good, happy ending. With tragedy it is 'nemesis,' a force which hunts down the excess caused by 'hybris' and imposes moderation, whereas with comedy, the already corrupt world seems to further decay until a reversal propels the play back to normality. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, too, then, one can identify the four young lovers' desperate efforts to remediate a broken world, and their eventual success in changing both Theseus and Egeus' minds is emblematic of the previously mentioned Catholic Providence. Moreover, one should also consider how Providence here does not interfere with any character's agency. The reversal Frye insists upon occurs due to "some kind of 'gimmick' or concealed device" (Frye 1993: 5), a scheme concocted by humans, for humans. Providence and free will are necessarily Catholic here, and with them in mind we explore the opening of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

In the very first setting of the play, we see Egeus accusing Lysander of having "given her rhymes" and "stol'n the impression of her fantasy" (I.i.28-32). An apparently insignificant act of wooing the lady, by no means specific to the play itself, Lysander's actions can be also said to rob Hermia of her agency. No longer can she see right from wrong as her faculty of reason has been irreparably stolen. Such an individual, as we shall later see, belongs to the kind of corrupt world which Shakespeare's Athens is. Not 15 lines further, in fact, Egeus invokes "the ancient privilege of Athens" (I.i.41) to strong-arm his daughter into marrying the right man. A city where the people are blind, fallible and where laws are excessively restrictive so that order can be imposed. This description does seem to anticipate a Hobbesian view of the world, and of man himself, and such a view should rather be associated with Protestantism than with Catholicism. We see now how the corrupt world which ought to be restored to normality is, in a sense, Protestant, a fact which reinforces the Catholic nature of the play itself. Further yet, consider how, in the second scene of the opening act, as if to confirm such a view, the mechanicals are introduced to represent the city itself. They do not partake in God's divinity, and this suffices for us to conclude that they are not built in a Catholic sense.

Another aspect of the initially decayed world can be seen in Hermia's wishful thinking: "I would my father looked but with my eyes" (I.i.56-57). In Athens, there is no sense of truth – no platonic ideal which would please the Catholic. Everything is relative, depending on the set of eyes which behold the world. Sceptic thought, probably introduced to Shakespeare through Montaigne's *Essays*, contributes to the creation of a 'decentered man.' See how the only solid foothold the senex has is Athens' laws – mere constructs, which, by the end of the play are no more. Theseus himself says that "earthlier happy is the rose distill'd/ Than that which withering on the virgin thorn/ Grows, lives and dies in single blessedness" (I.i.76-78). Behind

Shakespeare's breathtaking use of language is the Protestant apology for earthly, ephemeral pleasures. Instead of abandoning silly distractions seeing as they are mortal, Athens embraces them precisely because they are so. This anticipates the Baroque 'carpe diem' movement, so far removed from Catholic principles. Notice Lysander's take on this topic: "Or if there were a sympathy in choice/ War, death, or sickness did lay siege to it/ Making it momentary as a sound" (I.i.141-143). Our hero is far removed from ignorance and in a state of complete awareness. Finally, one ought to consider Helena's words: "Love looks not with the eyes but with the mind;/ And therefore is wing'd Cupid painted blind" (I.i.234-235). The very same eyes which, to Athens, are used to symbolize the multiple, incomplete perceptions of reality, are once again belittled; the real, we see that with the mind, with reason, something that Augustine could have very well taught himself. Even love, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is Catholic.

The comedy's final act is relevant to us in virtue of Theseus' wise soliloquy in lines 90 – 105: "The kinder we, to give them thanks for nothing" (V.i.89) – the now changed ruler, Theseus is fully aware of the mechanicals' naïve ignorance, and in a wholly Catholic resolution is compelled to give credit to any man. As Augustine would have it, everyone has God within. This impressive shift in perspectives on the behalf of Theseus we owe to the movement that Frye analyzes in his "The Argument of Comedy" (1948). The critic finds, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a movement from the corrupt realm of Athens to a 'green world' of rejuvenation, in which decayed aspects of the universe are reborn much improved. To the Catholic interpretation this matters profoundly because the 'green world' encompasses a complete overhaul of man; in Oberon's forest, the lovers are stripped of all principles, education, upbringing. What remains is man's nature, and, in a Catholic fashion, that nature is ignorant to the bone. Perhaps best exemplified by the two men's hopelessly amusing quarrel in the mist, ignorance is the basest state of man. Notice the opposition between virtue and unawareness, and not between virtue and vice: "In comedy, the moral norm is not morality but deliverance" (Frye 1948: 11); deliverance from ignorance, one might dare to add. To witness Theseus evolving so quickly, and to see him wave the condemnable law of the city ("Egeus, I will overbear your will;" IV.i.178), I imagine Augustine would have loved Shakespeare's comedy had he been alive to attend it, though that can hardly be said of Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*, to which we now turn.

In a similar fashion to the previous analysis, I shall first look at Marlowe's play from a more general, and then particular point of view. What strikes the reader of this tragedy is Faustus' punishment. As opposed to a Catholic Providence, which, as we have established, seeks to restore balance, Marlowe's imagined Providence seems to actively deceive and torture the poor Faustus with eternal damnation. The world has no need for such extreme sufferance, yet the omnipotent Protestant God is not to be questioned: "to wonder at unlawful things" (chorus III: 6), as it is not in man's power to grasp divinity. Moreover, consider the extent to which Faustus possesses agency. It could be said that he willingly contracts Mephistopheles, yet, at a closer read, one

finds the constant influence of the Good and Evil Angels. At his every thought, Faustus is either ignorant, or controlled by higher powers. Finally, of the play's general characteristics, the most striking is the existence of evil. Not only does such a force appear as an opposite of divinity, but it also takes human shape ("Go, and return an old Franciscan friar" scene III, 31). Evil is imbedded into the fabric of humanity. With that in mind we begin to observe the initial and final scenes of *Dr. Faustus*.

The very first of Faustus' actions we learn to be abjuring knowledge: "Affords this art no greater miracle? / Then read no more; thou hast attained that end" (scene I, 9). Besides the obvious anti-Catholic stance of disdaining wisdom, the reason why Faustus is disappointed with knowledge is crucial. In his endeavors, our protagonist sees too little practical appliance, too few fruits of his labor: "The end of physic is our body's health. / Why, Faustus, hast thou not attain'd that end?" (scene I, 17-18). Such a stance is representative of the Protestant distaste for ideological, hardly applicable tenets, and this train of thought inevitably leads towards an interrogation of divinity – which Faustus subsequently does too: "Jerome's Bible, Faustus; view it well […] The reward of sin is death: that's hard […] If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and / there is no truth in us." (scene I, 44-58). Here lies the 'decentering of man' which Dollimore was referring to in his works. Faustus allows himself to enjoy ephemeral pleasures - "O, what a world of profit and delight" (scene I, 67) – because he no longer finds happiness in virtuously aspiring towards divinity. He has, in consequence, traded God for twenty -four years of illusionary power.

Towards the end of the play, we approach Faustus' final hours preceding his eternal damnation. As for the anti-hero's punishment, it is crucial to understand that it is not his Protestant stance that damns him, rather his hybris throughout the play: "O, by aspiring pride and insolence; / For which God threw him from the face of heaven" (scene III, 92). The tragic quality of Marlowe's play seeps in, in the final scenes, through a sudden moment of anagnorisis on the behalf of Faustus. Controlled by evil his entire life, Faustus awakens on the verge of damnation ("Accursed Faustus, where is mercy now? / I do repent; and yet I do despair" scene XII 91-92) and wonders if there should be any hope for him: "My limbs may issue from your smoky mouths; / So that my soul mount and ascend to heaven!" (scene XIV 122-124). What ensues is the Protestant Providential resolution, one which cares not for balance, or even a sense of slight satisfaction. When Hamlet perishes, another prince arrives to signal a better future, a more stable universe; Macbeth dies at the hand of a more capable ruler; when Faustus falls, his scholars can only wonder how such a learned man could suffer in hell. We learn, in Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*, not to "practice more than heavenly power permits" (chorus III, 8) – no other clue is needed, no better understanding of God required in the Protestant vision.

In the end, one must inevitably ask how any of this serves some purpose. Why should this reading of Elizabethan drama produce any meaningful interpretation? To answer that, one ought to go back to where we began, namely to the connection between religion and literature. There is, here, another aspect to consider. In their

efforts to create universes and represent human nature or condition, Elizabethan playwrights become the very gods of their worlds. From such a position, the Providence which they impose on their own characters speaks volumes when it comes to their own perceptions of reality. The Catholic in Shakespeare wrote *A Midsummer Night's Dream* such that, at every level of the play, God is kind and extends His gracious, stable divinity to even the basest of mechanicals. On the other hand, Marlowe, who is suspected to have been an atheist, would have certainly been closer to the Protestant sceptic and empirical thought than to Catholicism, and therefore his *Dr. Faustus* reflects how deeply he felt about frailty in easily corruptible men. All of these within the Elizabethan age: a time when Catholicism and Protestantism grew as doctrines, even spurred by each other's influence. Reading Elizabethan drama is bound to make us look inward, and recognize both our need to become a character in Shakespeare's soothingly concluded comedies, and accept that we have so much more than just ignorance which muddles the waters of our conscience, and that life may not be, after all, a comedy.

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BODY MATTERS: DISABLED EMBODIMENT IN CARSON MCCULLERS' *THE HEART IS A LONELY HUNTER*

This essay is concerned with analyzing representations of disabled embodiment in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter,* written by Carson McCullers and published in 1940. By applying the theoretical framework of critical disability studies in my analysis, I employ disability theory and perform a close reading in order to examine whether disabled representations in this Southern Gothic text resist or reinforce normative understandings of impairment and disability, therefore rendering the impaired individual as a figure of otherness.

My study adheres to what disability scholars Mitchell and Snyder have called the "cultural model of disability," within which impairment is understood as a form of human difference challenged by both environmental barriers and culturally determined understandings of it, but embodied disabled experience is foregrounded and regarded as "meaningful materiality" rather than dispensed with (2011: 10). Thus, in elaborating my arguments, I will be focusing on the materiality of the exceptional body as it appears and is used by the narrative of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, starting from the belief that resisting readings of disabled identities as exclusively symbolic or metaphorical experiences allows us to gain a more dimensional understanding of difference. Ultimately, by problematizing and analyzing representations of disability in Carson McCullers' text, I hope to help reverse what Lennard Davis labelled "the hegemony of normalcy," – which refers to the dominance of able-bodied individuals in cultural productions and the general coupling of ability with "the notion of progress, of industrialization, and of ideological consolidation of the power of the bourgeoisie" (2006: 15), as opposed to the disability standing outside the norm.

One of the main assumptions of this essay is that characters with disabilities carry ideological meaning. Young as it is, disability studies in the humanities should be understood "as both an academic discipline and as an area of political struggle" (Davis 2006: xv), and disabled representations in literature – as well as in art, culture and various media – are not merely a reflection of how disabilities are framed and understood in society, but also "a question of politics and power(lessness), power over, and power to" (Devlin and Pothier 2006: 2).

The text I have chosen to analyze pertains to a genre which offers rich soil for disability studies – the Southern Gothic. Disability takes up a particularly important role in the Southern Gothic imagination, where it is not limited only to aesthetic representation, but it actually contributes to a broader conversation around regional and national eugenic anxieties in the early decades of the twentieth century, given the emergence of a "trope of the backward South" in the American collective

consciousness throughout the eugenic era, as previously set out by Southern studies scholars such as Leigh Anne Duck, who argued against an understanding of the Southern Gothic, southern grotesque and southern folklore as "apolitical or even conservative literary modes" (2009: 12), considering that eugenic thought largely shaped Southern literature and American modernist writers' representations of disability in their works. Leading figures of this genre – particularly those writing in the early twentieth century, such as William Faulkner, Carson McCullers, Tennessee Williams, or Flannery O'Connor, take great interest in 'freaks,' who are often incorporated into their narratives, and who may be defined as characters displaying physical or mental 'abnormalities.' Still, the body of criticism available on *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* has, up until recently, consisted primarily in metaphorical readings of this novel, and traditions such as the Gothic or the grotesque often generate metaphorical and symbolical readings of disabled characters – thus obscuring the social and political dimensions of impairment.

Carson McCullers' novel is set in the American South during the Great Depression and it tells the story of John Singer, a deaf and non-verbal man, whose absence of hearing becomes a source of universal knowledge and understanding within his community, as his ability to speak using his body comes to be seen as desirable by the other characters. The book starts with the moment when John Singer's intimate friend, Spiros Antanopoulos – who is also a deaf-mute, as well as a cognitively impaired character – is taken to a state asylum, with the novel culminating in John Singer's suicide following his only friend's sudden death. In other words, Singer seems to fit harmoniously into the world at the beginning of the narrative, but he eventually experiences what disability scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thomson has theorized as 'misfitting' (2011), when he loses his only means of expression with his (misfit) companion's institutionalisation. People with disabilities, Garland-Thomson argues, have historically been perceived as misfits (in cultural representations, as well as in society), but there is also a material side to misfitting – we recognize it, for instance, when bodies in a particular shape and function cannot conform to "the shape and stuff of the [built] world" (2011: 594). Moreover, any of us may fit somewhere, at some point in time, and misfit in another time and place – this is precisely the case of John Singer, whose deaf identity is denied by the able-bodied within his community.

Throughout the book, Singer becomes the confidant of various other outcasts in a Georgia mill town, their only common denominator being their lonesomeness: these are Mick Kelly – a tomboy on the verge of adolescence, the idealistic Doctor Copeland – who feels alienated from the black community, Jake Blount – a wanderer with a drinking problem and far-left ideas, as well as Biff Brannon, the very observant owner of the town's most visited café. Throughout the narrative, the disabled character is exceptionalised and is conferred a sort of mythical status, even, as ""[they] would come and talk in the silent room, for they felt that the mute would always understand whatever they wanted to say to him. And maybe even more than that" (McCullers 2000: 85). As Siebers points out in an article where he advocates for realistic

representations of the disabled body, mythologizing disability as an advantage comes easiest since disabled bodies function as generators of both fear and fascination for the able-bodied person, who "cannot bear to look at the unruly sight before them but also cannot bear not to look" (2006: 178). However, it is precisely through this purely metaphorical interpretation of John Singer's deafness that these characters prove their unwillingness to understand John's absence of hearing as more than a medical impairment. As such, the deaf character serves as a blank canvas onto which others get to project their own liminal embodiment (or ways of 'misfitting,' to use Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's critical concept), as well as these characters' illusion that they are finally being understood. In the words of the narrator, "[e]ach man described the mute as he wished him to be" (McCullers 2000: 186).

For example, Doctor Copeland (the African-American physician) believes that Singer's knowledge must be that of someone "who belongs to a race that is oppressed" (McCullers 2000: 117). Marxist agitator Jake Blount, on the other hand, feels that John Singer is "the only one in this town who catches what I mean" (25). Brannon takes a liking to John Singer as he "had a special friendly feeling for sick people and cripples" (24), perhaps in the context of his own impotence, whereas Mick Kelly interprets Singer's silence as a mark of culture and wisdom, which she herself yearns to embody.

But, of course, John Singer does communicate, despite his able-bodied visitors' ignorance of the materiality of his extraordinary condition. In the view of linguistic anthropologists Armstrong, Stokoe and Wilcox, syntax "is metaphorically embodied in the direct actions, that is gestures, of our hands and other parts of our bodies" (1995: 235). And for John Singer – a deaf-mute – this is especially true, given that sign language is inherently embodied. In the presence of these people who exceptionalise Singer's absence of hearing, however, he merely "sat in a straight chair by the window with his hand stuffed tight into his pockets" (McCullers 2000: 83), as if unable to sign, as opposed to when "his hands shaped the words in a swift series of design" (208), in the company of his hearing-impaired friend: "[a]t home Singer was always talking to Antonapoulos" (10). In fact, Singer's absence of speech – which his visitors interpret as a sign of his being intelligent and civilised – is actually an effect of their othering of Singer, as we are told that he always "nodded or smiled to show his guests that he understood" (83), only to reveal in an unsent letter to his institutionalised deaf friend that his visitors "and I have a secret together but I do not know what it is" (180).

Moreover, readers learn that John Singer has not been a mute from birth, but his experience of verbal speech is described as painful and unnatural: "He could never become used to speaking with his lips. […] From the blank expression on people's faces to whom he talked in this way he felt that his voice must be like the sound of some animal or that there was something disgusting in his speech" (2000: 15). A quick look into the history of the treatment of deaf people by the hearing establishment throughout the history of the United States might shed some light on passages such as this one. In *The Mask of Benevolence*, Harlan Lane compares the treatment of deaf

people by the hearing establishment – which has, over the course of history, incarcerated deaf people in institutions, punished them for using ASL (American Sign Language) in schools, as well as forced them to wear cochlear implants in its attempt of 'normalizing' the Deaf – to the colonial practices of European imperialists (Lane 1992). The above quote from the novel suggests that Singer might have experienced such a treatment earlier in life, determining him to eventually reject oralist culture and simply not speak again.

However, while this approach obviously results in the othering of the impaired person, Singer's visitors' idealization of him proves to be just as harmful. In the unsent letters to Antonapoulos, Singer confesses that "[m]y hands have been still so long that it is difficult to remember how it is [to talk]" (McCullers 2000: 180), which indicates, once again, Singer's misfitting, as a result of his environment no longer sustaining "the shape and function of the body that enters it" (Garland-Thomson 2011: 594).

Thus, the able-bodied characters' repeated symbolic understanding of deafness, as well as their blatant rejection of gaining some sort of "Deaf insight" – a term coined by Rebecca Sanchez, which implies an embodied and cultural knowledge of deaf people (Sanchez 2020) – eventually alienate Singer from his own embodied identity. That being said, Singer ends up adopting the same strategy in relation with his deaf companion: "Singer never knew just how much his friend understood of all the things he told him. But it did not matter" (McCullers 2000: 10). Moreover, "the fact that Antonapoulos could not read did not prevent Singer from writing to him" (79), which is very much akin to the other characters wondering just how much Singer can understand from what they are telling him. Readers find out that "he had always known that his friend was unable to make out the meaning of words on paper, but as the months went by he began to imagine that perhaps he had been mistaken, that perhaps Antonapoulos only kept his knowledge of letters a secret from everyone" (174). So, then, ironically enough, Singer ends up ignoring the materiality of his friend's cognitive impairment, thus replicating the very process of othering that his visitors have subjected him to.

Scholars such as Heidi Krumland have discussed Antonapoulos's flat construction, and about the focus that McCullers places on his corporeality, without ever properly addressing his disabled identity. In Krumland's view, "Antonapoulos is excluded from common humanity because he is lacking the perception of any emotions besides appetite for food and diversion (2008: 40). This time, then, it is excessive embodiment that sets Antonapoulos apart from other characters – he is insistently described as "round", "oily", "his hands fumbled languidly with the crotch of his trousers" (McCullers 2000: 84), and he somehow seems to be getting fatter and fatter each time Singer visits him in the asylum.

We might conclude with the observation that, in the work of Carson McCullers, disabled identity functions merely as a type of "narrative prosthesis," a concept theorized by disability scholars David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, and which

refers to "the pervasiveness of disability as a device of characterization in narrative art" (2011: 9). Theorizing the role of disability in literary narratives and the latter's dependency upon the former throughout history, David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder suggest that disability has been historically used as a "crutch upon which literary narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potentiality, and analytical insight" – this, they conceptualize through the phrase "narrative prosthesis" (2011: 49), which indicates the motivations for the employment of disability in literary narratives. Mitchell and Snyder's concept refers to those stories which base their relationship with disability on exploitation, as "the textual (disembodied) project depends upon – and takes advantage of – the materiality of the body" (2011: 50), discharging the corporeal dimension of disability and thus failing to address the social and political dimensions of disabled identity. But although (or precisely because) the disabled body is often represented metaphorically and functions as a stand-in for other identities, or is othered by its correlation to a lack, a form of divine punishment, societal collapse, or moral corruption in literature, recent disability studies research has proposed a return to the body in order to reveal and combat the imbalance between representations of disability and its materiality.

McCullers' novel may not succeed in illustrating a form of complex disabled embodiment, given its metaphorical treatment of various forms of physical and cognitive difference; 'the heart is a lonely hunter' indeed, in that disability seems to function as a prosthesis and symbolic stand-in for a general feeling of lonesomeness and alienation within the literary narrative. All able-bodied characters in this novel feel misunderstood – therefore, although the novel culminates in John Singer's suicide, his narrative purpose seems conveniently bound to the other four central characters. However, the book (paradoxically) does present the reader with the dangers of ignoring the materiality of one's disabled identity, and, as I have shown earlier, this is mainly done by emphasizing Singer's detachment from his own disabled embodiment, but also through Antonapoulos's inexplicable death, which eventually triggers Singer's suicide.

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A MORAL AND RELIGIOUS APPROACH TO ORDER AND CHAOS IN DANIEL DEFOE'S *ROBINSON CRUSOE* AND MICHEL TOURNIER'S *FRIDAY*

As the title of the paper suggests, Daniel Defoe's novel, *Robinson Crusoe*, has always been marked by debates concerned with morality and religion. In this respect, anyone may be tempted to ask whether something new can be brought to the table. An encouraging answer would be that any interpretation is valid, even if it reiterates what skilled critics have already mentioned. On the basis of their observations, in the following article we will attempt to explore the concept of Order and Chaos in *Robinson Crusoe* (year), with frequent references to Michel Tournier's modern take on the plot, in *Friday, or, The Other Island* (1967)– more commonly known as just *Friday*.

So as to ensure a clear structure, the paper will abide by a set of main guidelines. As a starting point, Daniel Defoe's novel will be contextualized, implicitly clarifying Michel Tournier's intentions. Next, the two versions of Robinson Crusoe will be compared in terms of similarities and main differences. The contrast is to be made by bringing up Robinson's attitude towards his life on the island, his developing relationship with Friday, ultimately leading to his decision surrounding his connection to the island.

An aspect meant to be remembered by any reader is that Daniel Defoe was the first 18th-century English writer to stand on the borderline between journalism and fiction, and build the pathway for the novel as a new genre. His originality derives from at least two innovations of his writing style. He first managed to appeal to all social classes through resorting to a more straightforward way of expression. The next bigger step was his ability to effectively use the first-person narrative, introduce a narrator who perceives reality through their own eyes, according to their degree of knowledge and sensitivity. In such cases, writers strive to make reality manifest itself, packed up with all its ambiguities, inconsistencies and limitations. It was revolutionary to have a narrator with a restrictive outlook, for they did not have the possibility to take on the traditional omniscient perspective.

First-person narratives instantly entail a new type of second-guessing from readers, as was pointed out by J. Paul Hunter in his book entitled *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction*: "Instead of authority and certitude, therefore, first-person perspective offered a field for speculation and sorting; to recount events as personal experience was to raise the questions of meaning and significance that a diarist faced in reviewing his or her own life." (1990: 45) The mention of a diarist can be associated with the role of a journalist, equally required to reconsider their telling of events. This link is also stressed by David Daiches in the second volume of *A Critical History of English Literature*: "His [Defoe's] intention was to reduce all literature to journalism, to tell invented things as though he were a

reporter writing an account for the press" (1994: 601). In addition to that, when being told about this "field for speculation and sorting" (Hunter 1990: 45), we need to remind ourselves that readers have the same walking pace as the narrator or, more accurately, even walk in the same shoes. This does lead to mystified individuals, apparent chaos – especially when there seems to be no escape – but the reassuring element is that we are dealing, at all times, with realistic situations which bring us closer to characters.

Returning to the novel itself, *Robinson Crusoe* is, indeed, a subjective recollection of events. In time, it has been discovered that the plot is founded on a real event, Alexander Selkirk's experience as a castaway after being abandoned on the uninhabited islands of Juan Fernández. The fascination lies in the vivid account of incidents and feelings which do come across as being convincing, despite the fact that Defoe himself never went through similar situations. Robinson's story is true to life in most of its details, but it is still depicted as containing "strange surprising adventures". The preface raises further questions about reliability, since it is stated that "the Editor believes the thing to be a just History of Fact; neither is there any Appearance of Fiction in it" (Defoe 2007: 4). Initially, the entire audience thought that Robinson Crusoe was the actual author, hence an intriguing blur between reality and fiction. In retrospect, the modern readers should keep in mind that Defoe sought to create a new area in literature, a new method of bringing people and characters together. As a result of this fusion, readers were bound to re-evaluate their own beliefs and attitudes, change anything, if it was necessary, in a much shorter time span than Robinson himself.

Since its publication, Defoe's novel has had a lasting impact on different generations throughout the past centuries. However, it probably does not come off as a surprise when people encounter "responses" to Robinson's story, reinterpretations more adjusted to current circumstances. As mentioned in the beginning, we are specifically referring to Michel Tournier's *Friday*. The title can be misleading, for any reader may expect to listen to Friday's own viewpoint. This would have even fitted the context, the second half of the 20th century, when postcolonialism as a literary theory was gaining popularity and critics sought to uncover prejudiced behaviors in literature. However, Tournier does not give Friday the chance to construct the narrative. Curiously enough, the audience is met with a God-like perspective, the bigger image of what happens in both Robinson and Friday's lives. A secondary aspect is that the two characters do get to switch their final symbolic outcomes – with Friday leaving the island and Robinson "steering away" from civilization. It is a sympathetic approach to the young Caribbean man, who should not be deemed as a source of true savagery and chaos, but rather as an embodiment of curiosity and compassion. More details regarding the relationship between the two figures will be discussed later on in this paper.

Having established the backdrop for both novels, in the following paragraphs we will be looking at the protagonist in more detail. It is vital to begin from his act of

defiance, which occurs in the first pages of the book. In his *Short Oxford History of English Literature*, Andrew Sanders also speaks of "defiance to both his [Robinson's] mother and his father," addressing it as "an act of rebellion" which is preceded by "the slow, painful redemptive journey back to a state of grace" (1994: 303-304). A glimpse into this young, zestful soul is what prepares the ground for chaos. At times, it may be difficult to accuse Robinson of wrongdoings, purely because he portrays the typical man eager to overcome various impediments, simultaneously certain of the fact that he is destined for greater experiences.

Parallel to this issue, religion is shown to be an essential theme from the very beginning, especially when Crusoe's father bitterly opposes his son's idea of traveling the seas. It is this parental warning which should be given more attention upon a second reading of the novel: "and tho' he said he would not cease to pray for me, yet he would venture to say to me, that if I did take this foolish Step, God would not bless me, and I would have Leisure hereafter to reflect upon having neglected his Counsel when there might be none to assist in my Recovery" (Defoe 2007: 7). It takes the earthly Father to pronounce the "truly Prophetick" (2007: 7) words, a clear authorial decision to set up the increasingly turbulent atmosphere. Each attempt at a new journey plants fear within Robinson, for he faces small trials which are supposed to discourage him from embarking on a ship. He does promise after every trip that he would live at peace on land, but, as expected, it does not last long until he feels his burning desire again.

Another foreshadowing moment has an ironic bent to it. In Brazil, while looking after a prosperous sugar plantation, Crusoe is overcome by another surge of dissatisfaction at one point: "In this manner I used to look upon my Condition with the utmost Regret. I had no body to converse with but now and then this Neighbour; no Work to be done, but by the Labour of my Hands; and I used to say, I liv'd just like a Man cast away upon some desolate Island, that had no body there but himself" (2007: 32). Michael McKeon makes a simple, but crucial observation in his book called *The Origins of the English Novel*: "At this early stage Robinson is quite blind to providential signs" (2002: 321). The retrospective perspective allows the protagonist to write some of the words in capital letters, passing onto them a much deeper significance, an obligatory state of alert for the reader who is on the verge of undergoing what Crusoe already has.

If we were to look back at the two longer quotes above and pinpoint the capitalized terms, we would notice how they could easily be linked to one another. The first quote has plenty of negative connotations ('foolish,' 'neglected,' 'none to assist') and for that reason only, all capitalized words should be taken as 'self-standing'. A small 'Step' out of 'the middle Station of Life,' with 'the fewest Disasters' (Defoe 2007: 6) follows a 'Condition' filled with 'Regret.' 'Leisure' precedes the initially dreaded 'Labour of Hands,' for doing 'Work' is the best 'Counsel' that Robinson can follow on his road to 'Recovery.'

The connection between Providence and work will be touched upon shortly, but momentarily Michel Tournier's beginning to *Friday* is to be brought up. The

French writer abruptly starts off the action amid Crusoe's journey, soon to be disrupted by the shipwreck. If Defoe revealed some preoccupation with religion, Tournier demonstrated that it was not the main focus anymore, by assigning the captain of the ship to predict Robinson's journey with tarot cards. Astrological signs and celestial objects are invoked in the captain's rather amusing exclamations (Tournier 1997: 9) and the readers are presented with modern elements, intended to be slightly shocking.

The Bible and references to God are certainly not absent from the story, but they cannot be regarded as fully profound, given the author's deliberate direction. The disregard of religion can also be considered a matter suitable even for present-day audiences, who undoubtedly have more freedom to be driven by other beliefs and ethics. However, one such aspect does bring forward a remark made by Andrew Sanders: "he [Robinson] establishes a principle which many contemporary Europeans would have regarded as offensively radical: a 'Liberty of Conscience' which tolerates pagan, Protestant, and Catholic alike" (1994: 304). It is an interesting facet, featuring Crusoe as above mixed religious views, with a possibly higher understanding of what he is capable of. Sanders' "contemporary Europeans" were those living at the same time as Robinson (including Defoe himself), but they happen to represent most of our own Europeans today, or any other individual across the world. In Tournier's case, it is the liberty of conscience heavily stretched so as to include revivals of unusual practices, such as tarot reading.

Moving further, to accentuate Order and Chaos in the two novels, it is important to look at the names of the island, designated by Crusoe. Defoe's hero oscillates between Order and Chaos, being aware of both extremes, but trying to lean more towards discipline. We are not particularly struck by the protagonist's natural survival instincts, activated within any person, but rather by the decisive label "the Island of Despair" (Defoe 2007: 60). Seeing himself in a state of hopelessness, Robinson needs to psychologically distance himself from the island and institute clear mental patterns. It may seem as though he wants to delude himself, but the admirable part is that it all works in his favor.

Tournier's Crusoe, however, is the polar opposite, giving up easily on the name "the Island of Despair" and opting for "Speranza" (Tournier 1997: 34). No one can blame this version of Crusoe for residing on the optimistic side. Most people would perhaps like him even more, simply because he kindles actual hope in readers' souls. These are the key aspects better highlighted by Ian Watt in *Myths of Modern Individualism*. Defoe goes for a "rational, careful, conventionally religious, highly organized" character and Tournier constructs a "more emotional, more introspective" hero (1997: 256). It cannot be claimed that Defoe's Robinson does not reveal emotions and address philosophical questions. But what pushes critics and most readers to describe him as being distant is precisely his calculated thoughts and actions, which do not leave room for a genuine connection with other people. Ironically, Tournier

may have actually created a more intimate narrative, despite his third-person perspective.

Having been accustomed to the names of the island, the correspondence between Providence and work is next to be explored. The Island of Despair bears a man who "had never handled a Tool in [his] Life" (Defoe 2007: 59), but who gradually learns to build a shelter or preserve sustenance and gunpowder. He also keeps track of time, leaving marks on a cross with each day passing. From this point on, no event is left unquestioned in terms of God's intentions. Getting familiarized with the Bible, Crusoe justifies both fortunes and setbacks as part of a bigger divine plan. Ian Watt detects "the first overt and extended treatment of religion" (1997: 158) when the protagonist comes across some rice and barley sprouts. It is curious to notice him shifting from one thought to another at times, as part of an analytical process, during which one is required to determine all the possible causes or consequences. Robinson first thinks "God had miraculously caus'd this Grain to grow without any Help of Seed sown" (Defoe 2007: 67), but soon remembers that he has, in fact, left behind some grains which have led to new sprouts. He is briefly disappointed that he is dealing with common situations, but he finally returns to his sense of gratitude faced with "so strange and unforseen Providence" (2007: 68).

Meanwhile, Speranza is the new home for a castaway who shows aversion when it comes to doing any labor on the island (Tournier 1997: 15). It is a much slower adaptation, hence more time until Robinson has the idea to start a log book. He does not jot down information about his material life, but instead he tracks his evolution, meditation and occasional flashbacks (1997: 33). An emotional turmoil may lie within Crusoe and it can be easily translated into chaos, a foggier perception of what is happening. We must point out, though, that he happens to grasp the fact that Speranza's similarly emotional spirit has to be balanced out by a dose of rationality, coming from no one other than its sole habitant (1997: 49). This reminds us of the other Robinson's shifting stance and allows us to accept that both versions have a similar starting point. Their thinking patterns are rooted in the same urge to question numerous issues, whether it comes from a place of rebellion or awareness.

Order and chaos accurately describe Defoe's Robinson, whose "main punishment" also "turns out to be a stroke of luck" (Watt 1997: 165), somehow a blessing bringing him closer to consistency. Any anomaly – such as the "infamous" footprint Crusoe comes across – is subjected to moral or religious explanation. In *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, Max Novak mixes morality and religion in the following statement: "at the same time that the footprint makes Crusoe believe, at first, that the Devil may have landed on his island, he approaches its appearance as a scientist might, measuring it, comparing it to his own foot, and looking about for evidence of the presence that might have produced it" (1996: 48). This helps better emphasize the book's understanding of Order.

Chaos can positively disguise the slightly eccentric practices and persistent, lengthy trains of thoughts belonging to Tournier's Crusoe. We can think of his unusual

portrayal of the island as a woman, an ideal feminine figure (Tournier 1997: 98), or his rhetorical questions arising in his journal entries – where Tournier craftily introduces first-person narrative (1997: 49). Robinson, therefore, treasures language more, the ability to construct a discourse and the countless directions one can take through the power of words, always carrying an emotional layer underneath.

Keeping in mind everything that has been indicated so far, we can proceed to the last part of the paper, centered on Crusoe's relationship with Friday and the island itself. Given the protagonist's behavior as a lonely person, it is tempting to query how he treats Friday in the two novels. He is, after all, still struggling with an inner "fundamental confusion – of self and other, of self and 'the enemy,' of God and the enemy, of God and self – born of his incomplete internalization of divine righteousness and autonomy" (McKeon 2002: 329). In Defoe's universe, Robinson reaches a God-like position, "taming" the savagery in Friday, within what McKeon calls a "metaphorical relationship of creator to creature," concealing a "sociopolitical subordination" (2002: 332). Friday seems to be thankful for Robinson's care, indirectly vowing to be an eternal slave, as a token of appreciation for having his life saved: "he kneel'd down again, kiss'd the Ground, and laid his Head upon the Ground, and taking me by the Foot, set my Foot upon his Head; this it seems was in token of swearing to be my Slave for ever" (Defoe 2007: 172). Crusoe's authority is obvious, almost burying Friday's loving spirit in search of potentially meaningful relationships. Nevertheless, when teaching him about Christianity, the protagonist detects Friday's spark and wit when he's addressing striking questions such as "*But (…) if God much strong, much might as the Devil, why God no kill the Devil, so make him no more do wicked?*" (2007: 184), thus leaving the protagonist quite astounded.

If that does not surprise readers enough, they will surely wonder about Crusoe's return to civilization at one point. His quick re-adaptation to the 'normal' course of events seems to be actually stripped off of any naturalness, at least until we are willing to change the outlook a bit. Yuval Noah Harari, an Israeli historian and university professor, who does not perceive the world from a similar religious position. In his first book, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, Harari suggests the notion of an 'imagined order' (with no connection to divinity), which has helped humanity establish mostly unfair hierarchies and the highly desired logical systems. By taking another look at Robinson's behavior, it may be easier to spot how the island does not exactly grant him the anticipated freedom. Indeed, Crusoe has the opportunity to get a taste of it, but he unconsciously brings civilization's social norms with him, for "though the imagined order exists only in our minds, it can be woven into the material reality around us" (Harari 2018: 112). Admittedly, as it has been shown throughout the article, this comes off as an automatic response to chaos. However, we may as well believe that Robinson has never left civilization, even after getting on the island, since "there is no way out of the imagined order. When we break down our prison walls and run towards freedom, we are in fact running into the more

spacious exercise yard of a bigger prison" (2018: 117). Through one such unfortunate situation, Harari precisely aims to reveal the illusion we tend to bring into our lives.

In the meantime, readers cannot help but look at Tournier's Friday and spot some similarities to Crusoe's version, in terms of cleverness and liveliness, which have the amazing potential to subdue the Master's 'tradition' to name things and people, in order to simply possess them, be in absolute control of them. In *Friday*, 'Western man'" seeking power ends up taking on primitive attitudes – which may be a possible solution to getting rid of the imagined order. In a postcolonial context, Tournier has Friday departing from the island and Crusoe truly fearing civilization. Ian Watt senses the Chaos – Order transition through Friday's incidental impact: "Crusoe gradually comes to understand that this companion belongs to 'some quite other order, wholly opposed to that order of earth and husbandry' which Crusoe has lived by" (1997: 259). What needs to be taken into account, as a final remark, is that the "order of earth and husbandry" clashes with the chaotic "spirit of the air" (1997: 259) in a manner which discards religion and transforms the protagonist into "a happy sun-worshipper" (1997: 260), as opposed to Defoe's representation of the terrestrial son of God – if we were to introduce a *son – sun* wordplay under these circumstances.

In conclusion, this paper has tried to shed more light upon the notions of Order and Chaos within Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Michel Tournier's *Friday*, from a moral and religious angle. It can be interpreted as an attempt to make readers altogether pay attention to other smaller details by purely reconsidering the perennial story of Robinson, alongside one of its modern adaptations. Crusoe was a new kind of hero in fiction, a credible Everyman in the 18th century and ever since, a figure which the audience could sympathize with. The story continuously comes off as an allegory of the fight between human nature and the hostile nature, a battle held on the Order and Chaos spectrum, eventually displaying the everlasting strength and perseverance of humankind.

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A WOMAN IN THE POSITION OF A PREDATOR: RESEARCH ON NINA BUNJEVAC'S *BEZIMENA*

The present research on Serbian-Canadian cartoonist Nina Bunjevac's *Bezimena* will focus on two different issues: on the one hand, the issue of sexual assault and on the other hand how women can also be predators. As opposed to the general stereotypes according to which a woman is an innocent creature, often the victim of the oppression around her and incapable to unjustified crimes, this comic turns this idea in its head and paints a monstrous picture of women that many would not expect. The current paper will focus on gender, analyzing how Bunjevac created a comic about female predators, even though she uses a man in her main plot. This will be followed by an analysis of the application of the issues presented in *Bezimena* in real life and as they relate to Slavic mythology. All the mentioned steps will lead us to an unexpected portrayal of women. The main framework used in the present study is the one defined in *Mothers, Monsters and Whores: Women's Violence in Global Politics* (2007) by Laura Sjoberg and Caron E Gentry.

Nina Bunjevac's background is important for the present study. She was born in Welland (Ontario, Canada) into a Yugoslavian family. She spent her formative years in Zemun, Yugoslavia (actual territory of Serbia), as her mother ran away from Canada with Nina and her sister to escape her very radical Serbian nationalist husband. She opens about her life and childhood in an interview with *Stripburger* magazine, number 67, June 2016. Her artistic career began when she was a student an art school in Yugoslavia. In 1990, when she returned to Canada, she attended an art high school and graduated from OCAD University of Art in 1997. She started her career with drawings, paintings and illustrations and she also worked as an art teacher. Her art was seen and praised in many international exhibitions. A decade after returning to Canada, she began publishing comic books, which had been her childhood passion.

Bezimena was published in 2019, as a noir-style graphic novel. The title means 'no name woman/ anonymous woman' in Serbian. Unlike other comics, in this one, the drawings are individually positioned on each page and the speech bubbles are not on the same page as the drawings, but also individually placed between the pages with drawings on a black starry night background. Speech bubbles are filled only with the story told by the narrator, not by the characters. At the end of the comic, Nina Bunjevac opens, recounting in an afterword her own experiences of sexual assault, which turns the graphic novel into a semi-autobiographical work.

It is essential to start the study by analyzing what should be called 'the main plot.' The present term, 'main plot,' is here to refer to the main story told by the comic, implying the idea that some ideas are intentionally excluded and they will be

discussed later. The story has two main protagonists, Benny (Benedict by his full name/the modern reincarnation of the priestess) and a woman presented by the nickname White Becky, her name could be associated with purity and virginity. The whole story is told from Benny's perspective. He was born 'in times of peace' in a loving and wealthy family. He had a normal childhood until school, where he started to have an obsession with his classmate, 'White Becky,' and he began to practice public masturbation. Friendless and considered an embarrassment to his family, he dropped out of school. His parents took a severe disciplinary approach, and their good family relationship fell apart. He began to keep all his thoughts and feelings to himself and grew up as a strange adult, knowing that as long as he keeps his thoughts to himself he would be safe. Yet, he had a habit of hiding in the shadow and staring at people in public parks. His obsessions never left him completely.

With his family's help, he later gets a job as a worker in a zoo, a job which pleases him at first, and where, at least for a time, he manages to work well. Although his habit of staring at people from private places remains, he manages to stay out of trouble until one day, when he unexpectedly sees White Becky and her companion at the zoo. He finds Becky's sketchbook left behind and follows her to her house, without any direct interaction and without having the courage to approach the woman and to return the sketchbook. Returning to his own home, he looks in Becky's sketchbook which is filled with sexual sketches showing instances from the future with him, Becky's companion and Becky involved in violent sexual encounters. He takes the sketchbook as a hint, or much more, as a detailed map to follow in order to get into Becky's house.

Following the precise indications in the sketchbook, Benny visits Becky's house three times, first having sexual encounters with her companion and finally, the last time, having a sexual encounter with her. Sexual acts are graphically represented as BDSM, which shows even more how women are tortured by his actions. Benny's character is illustrated as being full of anger. Some facial expressions of the female victims show shock, while others look absolutely neutral. However, women are not shown trying to escape the predator, accepting sexual assault as if they were dead.

After the sexual encounter with his childhood obsession, Becky, Benny's world becomes more surreal than ever and he is haunted by disturbing sexual dreams, most involving little girls and stuffed animals. His sexual act with Becky is the final detachment from reality, presented even in the comic in an oneiric plan. Becky seems to be 'given' to him by some surreal forces, he feels like he rightfully obtained her and this scene is presented again as part of a dream that illustrates the trade of a man buying a young girl with a bear mask on her face. The bear mask present in this dream is strongly connected to the previous dreams that he had had, where naked girls were surrounded by teddy bears. Even in Becky's oneiric sexual assault, she is portrayed as being dressed in clothes similar to a school uniform and teddy bears are all over the floor.

This could be a hint to the girls' age and to the fact that they are minors and virgins, even if their bodies in the drawings do not seem to match this aspect. The return to reality happens when Benny wakes up with the police at his door. The transition from the sex scene to Benny's bell, which wakes him up, happens very smoothly, yet violently, narrated in his dream as someone inserting a finger into a bell, drawn as a female genital organ, symbolizing the dehumanization of the woman, her exploitation only as an object and, at the same time, making a transition from dream to reality. He is arrested for raping and killing three girls. In the photos from the police department, their bodies do not look like the drawings from the sexual assault scenes, which indicates that their voluptuous bodies were the product of Benny's imagination and, in reality, were just girls. This implies the idea that White Becky remains an unreal obsession, given the age difference between Benny and his victims. Benny insists that it is a misunderstanding and he is willing to show the sketchbook to the police. The sketchbook was filled with children drawings of animals in the zoo. Benny is declared guilty of rape and murder, so he ends up in jail, even if he still doesn't understand the reason why.

From now on, as it is time to clarify the relationship between the main plot and female predators, this research would like to shed light on the question: Does gender matter? It is clear by now that the male predator, Benny, is fully responsible for his actions, is a murderer and a rapist and clearly deserves to be punished. There are no excuses for his actions. Mental illness is from the beginning denied to be an excuse that allows people to commit such crimes. But what if Bunjevac had drawn a woman? Would this change the way the predator is seen? What if he, Benny, was a woman?

In the first chapter of *Mothers, Monsters and Whores: Women's Violence in Global Politics,* Sjoberg and Gentry discuss how women can make newspaper headlines with their cruel and inhumane acts, giving some examples of women being suicide bombers (pretending to be pregnant), killers and abusers, which is in opposition with the expected ideal of "maternal, emotional and peace-loving" (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007: 1) women. Due to this association of stereotypes with the female gender and the idea of inherent male violence, women's crimes are always hidden or try to be excused by the fact that 'they are women." Sjoberg and Gentry support the idea that women's violence exists, even if it is in opposition with the stereotypes mentioned before and the wanted image of an ideal woman. Taking the example of feminist studies, the authors discuss the idea that some of the studies state how male violence "destroys women's life." This male violence includes all forms of violence, from domestic violence, to the global level of wars and war rape cases, because most of those involved in wars are men. But, just like men, women are able to express their personal and political dissatisfaction through violent means. The methodology presents the term 'Beautiful Soul,' associated with women, which puts them in opposition with the term 'war.' Yet, it is acknowledged that war has a huge impact on the oppression of women, but this stereotype of victimization has also begun to be used as an alibi for

violent women> "Still women, like men, are capable of violence. As women's freedoms increase, so will their violence. Women, like men, commit violence for a variety of reasons, some rational and some irrational" (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007:4). Despite their violent acts, it the idea is stressed that women are not characterized as regular criminals, soldiers or terrorists. These aspects are considered fantasized ideas, which are rare, and the respective persons automatically lost their 'woman qualities.'

Gender norms have become a framework, and not fitting into it could create unpleasant life experiences and oppression in society for both men and women. Sjoberg and Gentry offer plausible examples in both directions: men perceived not to be masculine enough receive hostility and violence from society; women who are enrolled in the army (considered for many still unusual) are wrongly labeled in two categories: the ones who sleep in room with men – sluts, and the ones who sleep in room with women – lesbians. However, even if in many countries women are allowed to perform some so-called tasks for men, this does not lead to gender equality. Having the previous example with women enrolled in the military, they are not 'soldiers' but 'women soldiers.' This label applies in all domains when it comes to things that are associated with masculinity, that's why society talks about: 'women criminals' or 'women terrorists.' They are not fully associated with the predator role, because the stereotypes come in the way, even if their actions do not make any differentiation between a criminal or terrorist, man or woman.

In accordance with the idea that women are able to commit violence in equal measure to men, we return to Bunjevac's *Bezimena*, in order to reveal some aspects of the plot that were intentionally eliminated previously from the plot. *Bezimena* contains a story within a story. The comic book starts with a conversation between two women. Only the speech bubbles are visible, on a black starry background. One of them shares the story of a mysterious old woman, Bezimena. The other woman (graphically represented as a star) is not portrayed sharing a story, but it might be considered that the other woman is the author, who listens and who ends up sharing her very own story through a final note.

In the story told by the narrator, Bezimena is a mysterious old woman (similar to a witch) who lives in the forest. A sinful priestess who is described as "a creature of habit," the habit being that of "perpetual and needless suffering," approaches and asks Bezimena for help to heal her suffering caused by people who burn her temple. She asks for her own life to be saved. Without a word, Bezimena submerges the priestess' head under the water. The water becomes a portal for time and space travel. The priestess experiences a rebirth in a man's body, more precisely in Benny's body. This metamorphosis process turns the priestess into a male predator, which later will symbolize how a woman can also be a predator taking part in an assault and the fact that it is not the body's gender that matters, but the soul and mind. When Benny's story starts, it is already clear for the readers that behind Benny's body, there is a woman.

It is very important to debate Bezimena's role. Is she a predator or a judge? Firstly, many similarities could be found between Bezimena and the Slavic mythological figure, Baba Yaga. The present research assumes that, spending his childhood in Yugoslavia and attending school there, Bunjevac got to know some traditional aspects of her native culture. According to Mike Dixon-Kennedy's *Encyclopedia of Russian and Slavic Myth and Legend*, Baba Yaga is a Russian myth that is extremely famous and has a correspondent in all Slavic cultures. Many elements presented in the encyclopedia lead to a great resemblance between Bezimena and Baba Yaga and are also relevant to the position of women as predators. Baba Yaga is represented as a witch who lives in the forest and has a deep knowledge of everything in the world, and many stories associate her with women. However, she is well known because she is the personification of death and the handmaid of the Devil. She is able to change the course of a person's life (just as Bezimena did with the priestess), she redistributes souls into newborns or keeps them in the underworld for eternity, as she has great power over time and space. She is the guardian of the fountain that provides The Water of Life and Death (Bezimena is also represented graphically standing next to a water that ends up by changing the priestess' course of life). Although Baba Yaga "may essentially be regarded as a feminine deity, she is equally at home in the world of men. She carries a wand with which she can transform herself and those at whom she directs its power, and she rules over the male genitalia" (Dixon-Kennedy1997: 27). She can also cause nightmares, hallucinations or deadly diseases, making us correlate her even more with Bezimena, because the priestess experienced everything as a dream or a hallucination.

In some stories, she is also associated with a bear, because the bear is considered the master of the forest. She is able to make human sacrifices prolong her life. In the comic, Bezimena and the priestess know each other and Bezimena submerges the priestess head under water forcing her sinful soul into becoming a predator. She is also a full predator as she sells White Becky (who wears a bear mask) to Benny in one of his dreams. This scene implies that Bezimena is in women trade and according her shadows in the dark, it is very visible how 'White Becky' has the body of a child, in contrast to Benny and Bezimena's bodies. Suggesting that she worked hand in hand with the predator, she is also disloyal, appearing as the witness at the police department, being the one who confessed that she had seen Benny entering the victims' house. Her confession does not come for the sake of the victims, but as a way in which she will be able to appear guilt free, to remain the 'anonymous' woman behind the crimes.

Nina Bunjevac's afterword is extremely important because it also contains female predators. When she was fifteen, in Serbia, she was exposed to a predator who wanted to record a pornographic tape. She was betrayed by her best friend and an older girl. Nina managed to escape the room before being raped, after annoying the middle-aged man by insulting his impotence. She found out that her best friend, Jasmine, had been sexually abused and started avoiding her, but after a while, under

pressure from their colleagues, they start talking again. But Jasmine betrayed her trust a second time, trying to expose her to a predator again. Her behavior started to change, even if nobody noticed. She managed to escape a third attempt of sexual assault, this time in Canada, from a man who she considered her legal-guardian. This episode caused her a severe depression and serious trust issues.

She decided to create this comic after a meeting with a former classmate who confessed that there were several girls in their class who were victims of sexual abuse. In her final note, the names of the victims are anonymous or changed, but the names of the predators (a man and a woman) are real and the author's intention is to expose them. She confessed that up to the date the police had done nothing. The man was found dead in mysterious circumstances, but the woman is still alive and hiding. Nina's story proves what Sjoberg and Gentry argue in their book, that women are just as bad as men when it comes to violence and abuse. Nina ends her comic book with the motto: 'Forget your enemies, but never forget their names' and she expresses regret at remaining silent for too long. She confessed that she would have liked to expose the predators sooner in order to heal some victims' suffering. She admits that she will never forgive herself for her lack of courage and that she will keep the regret forever. Nina Bunjevac dedicates her comic book "to all forgotten and nameless victims of sexual violence." She ends it with the following quote: "May you find peace, may you find light, and may you dispel the darkness that envelops you."

Numerous conclusions can be drawn from the research. In full agreement with Sjoberg and Gentry, masculinities and femininities are just a series of expectations, stereotypes and rules applied to men and women just because they are part of a gender category. Of course, debating the whole diversity present in masculinities and femininities, it is unrealistic to believe that there is something that all people perceive to be men or women, as gender communality does not make similar life experiences. Also, the present study does not want to argue that absolutely all acts of women's violence are unjustified or that they are always fully responsible for their actions (sometimes violence is necessary for self-defense), but that, just like men, women could engage in violent actions, in full knowledge of the cause and freedom of action. If, as resulted from the present research, most of the time gender and stereotypes play an important role in judging a crime, Bunjevac destroys this idea by presenting in her comic a series of female predators which are hidden behind a man's body. Being more used to a male predator, the readers are tempted to judge Benny without any mercy but, it is extremely clear from the start that he is a man just symbolically and that, in reality, he is a woman. This aspect raises awareness over the fact that men and women might not be as different as they seem, and they both deserve to be judged according to their actions, not according to their gender. This comic book is also an important material about sexual abuse, debating the importance of confessing your experiences in order to help others too (in a manner that Nina Bunjevac makes it clear that she does not force the victims to talk, as she understands how hard it is to discuss this subject sometimes), it destroys numerous misconceptions

about sexual assault proving that anyone could be a predator and one person could be a victim, no matter the place, time of day or the way in which a person is dressed. Most importantly, the book shows that certain cases (as Benny, who's obsession was depicted from his childhood) require professional help in order to prevent the risk of becoming a sexual predator.

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WHEN SITCOMS 'GET REAL': OUTCOMES OF FAMILY TRAUMA IN *BOJACK HORSEMAN* AND *THE GOOD PLACE*

For decades, sitcoms have been a popular form of entertainment, favored by many as a type of escapism. Descriptive studies by Aronson (2000) and Mills (2009) have presented the sitcom as a historical genre, noting some of its most persistent qualities through time. Dalton and Linder (2015) have found that contemporary sitcoms discuss more complex issues than their predecessors, including mental health. Research in trauma studies (van der Kolk and McFarlane 2004; Herman 2015; Balaev 2018; Passer and Smith 2019) has placed trauma at the center of text analysis, especially regarding literature. Surprisingly, so far there has been little academic discussion about the presence of trauma in sitcoms or its outcomes. Using the contemporary critically acclaimed sitcoms *BoJack Horseman* (2014-2020) and *The Good Place* (2016-2020) as case studies, this study explores the link between family trauma and character development as reflected in the behaviors of the series' respective protagonists.

BoJack Horseman and *The Good Place* as "Traumedies"

Sitcoms, short for "situation comedies," are defined by Mills as "a form of programming which foregrounds its comic intent" through its conventions regarding duration, character types, and setting, among others (2009: 49). Sitcoms generally focus on a family-like cast of characters who traditionally embody certain comedic types in a comic mirroring of reality (Aronson 2000: 13). Because sitcoms generally present a comic perspective on reality, the moments of 'tragic relief,' when a distressing situation is treated seriously and respectfully, are more impactful (Mills 2009: 7). Contemporary sitcoms place a strong emphasis on 'tragic relief' by having an ongoing complex developmental arc of the main characters, whose emotional journeys have them face issues related to their emotional growth (Dalton and Linder 2015: 320-321).

One issue that recent sitcoms have tackled is trauma. Balaev (2018) defines trauma as a disruptive incident affecting a person's emotional well-being and future perceptions of life. Trauma studies focus on identifying symptoms of psychological damage and the reconstruction of reality around trauma in artistic works (2018: 360). As part of trauma studies, Schachtman has identified a new artistic medium: "traumedies," which integrate trauma as a central element in comedic narratives (2016: 21). In such works, although their implicit purpose is to deconstruct the traumatized character's psyche, humor plays a central role, fluctuating between "cartoonish and absurd, verbally inventive, joyously obscene and profane, or swollen with the sudden glory of mockery" (2016: 23). Farb (1981) and Martin (1993) consider

humor to have multiple purposes in relation to trauma: it is a form of tension relief and a coping mechanism; it mirrors reality and facilitates interaction; and it can be used to deflect negative emotions.

BoJack Horseman and *The Good Place* are both examples of contemporary "traumedies" that use comedic elements to present their main characters' struggles with mental health. In *BoJack Horseman*, the eponymous character is a washed-up sitcom actor who battles alcoholism and his dwindling fame. *The Good Place* follows the afterlife efforts of Eleanor Shellstrop, an egotistical woman, to belong in the Good Place (analogous to Heaven) after she was mistakenly brought there after her death. Both characters behave in an absurdly selfish manner, crack witty jokes at the expense of others, get "funny drunk" regularly, etc. Their behaviors are presented as humorous at first; however, it gradually becomes clear that BoJack and Eleanor are deeply troubled characters who use humor not as a weapon, but as a shield.

The Root of Trauma: Childhood Abuse

The maladaptive tendencies of BoJack Horseman and Eleanor Shellstrop can be traced back to their abusive parents whose behavior they mimic in adulthood. Childhood abuse is defined as a type of cumulative trauma in which a parental figure causes their child either psychological or physical distress by creating a domestic environment of constant terror (Symington 1993, Herman 2015). The abuse BoJack and Eleanor endured in their childhood is revealed through traumatic memories, a central concept in trauma studies (Balaev 2018: 363).

Despite being abusive addicts, their fathers are portrayed as having less influence on them than their mothers, Beatrice Horseman and Donna Shellstrop. The fathers are often in the background of their children's flashbacks, violent or indifferent to their needs. They both die before the series begin, with their funerals acting as a place of futile confrontation between the children and their mothers: Beatrice criticizes BoJack for "always play[ing] the fool" ("Thoughts and Prayers", S04E05), whereas Donna introduces herself as Eleanor's sister and drunkenly attempts to seduce Eleanor's boyfriend ("Existential Crisis", S02E04). As such, the main source of their childhood distress is depicted on-screen as coming from their mother figures, whose traits BoJack and Eleanor subconsciously adopt.

Beatrice Horseman's and Donna Shellstrop's personalities and parenting styles are similarly destructive. They are both alcoholics who neglect their children and stunt their emotional growth. Beatrice chain-smokes and often gets blackout drunk, leaving bottles of alcohol in BoJack's reach ("A Horse Walks into a Rehab", S06E01). Donna always appears with a cocktail in her hand in Eleanor's childhood flashbacks ("Mindy St. Claire", S01E12; "Existential Crisis", S02E04; "A Fractured Inheritance", S03E06). Once, when a young BoJack steals one of her cigarettes, Beatrice makes him finish it and berates him for being emotional: "Don't you dare cry. Don't you *ever* cry!", even going as far as saying that his punishment is not for smoking, but

for "being alive" ("The Shot", S02E09). Similarly, after confessing to accidentally killing her puppy and seeing her sulk, Donna tells Eleanor: "The point is: don't be sad. Honestly, I'll get kind of annoyed if you *do* get sad" ("Existential Crisis", S02E04).

BoJack's and Eleanor's Troubling Self-Images

Familial mistreatment can profoundly affect a child's sense of self-worth. Herman mentions that adults who were abused as children adopt maladaptive defense mechanisms to improve their self-image (2015: 98). Passer and Smith define defense mechanisms as unconscious psychological processes that help people cope with the subsequent pain of traumatic experiences by rejecting or distorting reality (2019: 506). Narcissism is one type of defense mechanism that allows individuals to self-enhance by emotionally distancing themselves and deflecting potential pain (Symington 1993: 74-75). In some cases, abused children insert themselves into the emotionally cold character of their parents (1993: 79). In the beginning of the series, both BoJack Horseman ("BoJack Horseman: The BoJack Horseman Story, Chapter One", S01E01) and Eleanor Shellstrop ("Everything is Fine", S01E01) are presented as narcissistic individuals who are unusually selfish and devoid of empathy.

Abused children who appear to have high self-esteem in their adulthood are often crippled by self-doubt (Herman 2015: 114). This is true for BoJack, who describes himself as a "selfish and narcissistic and self-destructive" person ("Downer Ending", S01E11), but believes himself worthless. His self-loathing is most evident in "Stupid Piece of Sh*t" (S04E06). Experimental in form and structure, the episode explores BoJack's internal monologue as he attempts to reconcile with the fact that his mother suffers from dementia and has recently moved in with him. Praised for its candid portrayal of the effects of depression on one's mind (Falvey 2020: 123), this episode proves that BoJack's apparent narcissism is a defense mechanism fueled by his lack of self-confidence (Simpson 2020: 24-25). Even when acknowledging his own self-destructive tendencies, BoJack tries to self-enhance by jokingly saying "That's my problem. I'm too good at sabotage. Why am I so good at everything I do?" ("Yesterdayland", S02E02).

Neglected children may adopt abusive and narcissistic behaviors to avoid other instances of victimization (Herman 2015: 111). Eleanor's apprehension towards other people is so great that she is seen abusing others in most of her interactions before her death: she sells counterfeit medication to the elderly, heckles mall vendors, verbally berates activists, yells at waiters, cyberbullies innocent women, etc. ("Mindy St. Claire", S01E12). Her exaggerated selfishness in these absurd situations is played for laughs, but it also reveals her deep trauma. Herman also writes that previously abused women are more likely to objectify themselves to boost their self-image (2015: 112). For Eleanor, commenting on her own physical appearance is a coping mechanism of self-enhancement and avoidance via comic relief. For instance, in a highly emotional scene with her partner Chidi, Eleanor deflects the pain of Chidi's

imminent memory wipe by emphasizing her sex appeal, tearfully claiming to be a "a legit snack" and that Chidi would inevitably become attracted to again ("Pandemonium", S03E12).

Mistreated children often struggle with a sense of "innate badness" well into adulthood. Herman defines "innate badness" as a belief system in which abuse is justified as being their own fault, caused by a perceived lack of self-worth (2015: 103). In BoJack's case, this belief is explicitly expressed by his mother as the finality of his character: "You come by it honestly, the ugliness inside you. You were born broken, that's your birthright. […] You're BoJack Horseman. There's no cure for that" ("Brand New Couch", S02E01). One of Eleanor's only overt moments of self-doubt arises when she questions her mother's apparent transformation for the better: "If Donna Shellstrop has truly changed, that means she was always capable of change… but I just wasn't worth changing for" ("A Fractured Inheritance", S03E07).

Perpetuation of Trauma in *BoJack Horseman*

BoJack Horseman explores the link between childhood trauma, substance abuse and the perpetuation of trauma. Herman (2015), van der Kolk and McFarlane (2004) note that men who were mistreated in their childhood are likely to repeat the cycle of abuse as perpetrators by assaulting or endangering others. They may exhibit poor self-control and violent tendencies, often intensified by an addiction to illicit substances (Herman 2015: 113). In *BoJack Horseman*, Simpson observes that the effects of drugs are shown by using the "blackout" as the main narrative technique: when BoJack is drunk or high, his subjective experiences are shown through short scenes of "bursts of clarity" interrupted mid-action by a black screen (2020: 29).

The "blackout" technique is used in many of BoJack's morally questionable moments in which he causes harm to other characters, underlining the dangerous mix of personal trauma and substance abuse. One example is "The Showstopper" (S05E11), where BoJack's newfound addiction to painkillers alters his already fragile state of mind. He experiences a blend of reality and a hallucinatory state in which he *is* Philbert, the murderous detective he is playing on-screen. Gina, his costar and lover, expresses her concern for his wellbeing throughout the episode, but is met with suspicion. In one scripted scene, the unhinged Philbert strangles Sassy. Once the cameras stop rolling, BoJack continues to physically assault Gina as he imagines/remembers her taking his pills earlier. BoJack only stops once people on set intervene.

BoJack's most severe transgression, however, is being responsible for the death of Sarah Lynn, a former child actress to whom BoJack is a mentor and father-figure. During a month-long bender with multiple blackouts, BoJack supplies Sarah Lynn with heroin. They visit a planetarium, where they contemplate their tumultuous pasts ("That's Too Much, Man!", S03E11). Sarah Lynn's death by overdose is implied during the episode's final moments, when she does not respond to BoJack's repeatedly

calling her name. Later in the series, it is revealed that she was only unconscious at the time. Afraid of being held accountable, BoJack waited seventeen minutes before calling an ambulance. Sarah Lynn died in the hospital; BoJack's waiting essentially sentenced her to death ("Xerox of a Xerox", S06E12).

Overcoming Trauma in *The Good Place*

During her lifetime, Eleanor Shellstrop is comparable to BoJack Horseman: a destructive person that perpetuates her trauma through abuse. Silverman and Swanson underline that "[a]pathy undermined Eleanor's moral development; she never really cared if others noticed that she lived immorally" (2021: 42). Yet Eleanor manages to overcome her traumatic childhood in the afterlife through her support system and self-improvement.

Herman believes that one of the most valuable elements of trauma healing is having a proper support system. In the case of childhood abuse victims, the "natural support system" is formed by their loved ones: familial, romantic and platonic (2015: 160). While Eleanor did have terrible parents that "gave her moral journey a bad start", she becomes a better person in the afterlife because the learns the value of bonding with other people (Silverman and Swanson 2021: 45). Eleanor develops close friendships over the course of their series with fellow humans and even supernatural beings, all of which help her develop different aspects of her personality. It is her friendship (and later on, romantic relationship) with Chidi that allows her to discover her passion for moral philosophy and helping others throughout the series. For example, she is willing to sacrifice herself to save others ("Mindy St. Claire", S01E12) and takes the initiative in saving humanity by assembling the "Soul Squad" ("Jeremy Bearimy", S03E04).

Herman notes that a victim of child abuse may obtain closure from their trauma by confronting their perpetrator. During the confrontation, the victim may be willing to expose their crimes to the public (2015: 211). For Eleanor, closure is achieved by confronting the mother figure she believes to be dead. This is the case in "A Fractured Inheritance" (S03E06), in which Eleanor discovers that her mother lives in Nevada under a false identity. Donna has joined a suburban community, taking on the role of a loving wife and stepmother. Suspicious of her motives, Eleanor tries to expose Donna's identity to her partner. When Eleanor understands that her mother has truly changed, she encourages Donna to commit to her newfound happiness and "break the chain of Shellstrop mother-daughter crappiness." Donna then recognizes Eleanor's growth: "It seems like you've turned into a really good person". Nonetheless, Eleanor does not need her mother's approval: she is aware of her own self-improvement gained from Chidi's moral philosophy lessons and does not intend to stop there.

Rationalizing the Different Outcomes of Trauma

As the previous two sections have outlined, trauma can have entirely different outcomes in sitcoms. This could simply be attributed to the fact that trauma responses vary between people in real life (Herman 2015: 113). However, a closer look at which philosophies the two shows explicitly adopt is much more revealing: while *BoJack Horseman* embraces existential nihilism and general pessimism regarding the human condition, *The Good Place* emphasizes the humanitarian benefits of contractualism and virtue ethics.

Despite its vibrant and silly cartoonish style, *BoJack Horseman* has a profoundly tragic perspective on life. Falvey argues that this is conveyed through its "dark, existential themes" and "sustained nihilistic tone" (2020: 122). Its existential nihilism is often expressed by its characters: "Everything is meaningless! Nothing I do has consequences!" ("BoJack Hates the Troops", S01E02); "The universe is a cruel, uncaring void. The key to being happy isn't a search for meaning. It's to just keep yourself busy with unimportant nonsense, and eventually, you'll be dead" ("Later", S01E12). It is no wonder that BoJack cannot overcome his trauma no matter how hard he tries, which eventually leads to his overdose ("The View from Upside Down", S06E15). His suicide might have been a meaningful and tragic end to a deeply troubled character; nonetheless, he survives. *BoJack Horseman*'s philosophy is succinctly expressed in the show's final interaction between BoJack and Diane: BoJack claims "Life's a bitch and then you die," to which Diane responds with "Sometimes life's a bitch and you keep living," BoJack sees death as a release from the pain and meaninglessness of life, but Diane stresses that it is not an easy escape from the consequences of his actions ("Nice While It Lasted", S06E16).

The Good Place is much more compassionate to its characters, for whom death is only the beginning of their moral improvement. Pamela Hieronymi and Todd May, the philosophers who worked on the show, acknowledge that while they have explored different philosophical perspectives in the series, they primarily used contractualism and virtue ethics as the main sources of inspiration: by placing a strong emphasis on interpersonal relationships (contractualism), flawed characters aspire, attempt, and manage to become moral people (2021: xxiii). Thus, in *The Good Place*, not only is virtuousness attainable even by the most morally corrupted people, but "[t]he point is," as Michael puts it, "people improve when they get external love and support. How can we hold it against them when they don't?" ("The Funeral to End All Funerals", S04E08). When Eleanor and the Soul Squad finally pass through the Last Door and dissolve into the Universe, they have already become the best versions of themselves and have overcome their individual traumas ("Whenever You're Ready", S04E13).

Conclusion

This study has found that *BoJack Horseman* and *The Good Place* mark the rise of "traumedies," in which sitcoms offer innovative explorations of trauma, its sources and outcomes for multifaceted characters who break stereotypes. Appropriating concepts from fields such as psychology and philosophy, these sitcoms manage to surpass the limitations of their genre, highlighting the serious outcomes of mental health disorders to broader audiences. These findings strengthen the idea that contemporary sitcoms offer complex, respectful and surprisingly accurate representations of real-life issues that can deeply impact the audience. While this study does not provide exhaustive analyses of the trauma responses presented in the shows, it touches upon some of the most relevant aspects of each, underlining the damaging effect of childhood trauma on adults. Further research is needed to examine how childhood trauma is presented in secondary characters from the shows discussed or even in other sitcoms.

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OTHER TRACES OF ITALY IN JAMES JOYCE'S COMPOSITIONS: THE REPRESENTATION OF THE INFINITE IN GIACOMO LEOPARDI AND JOYCE'S WORKS

Introduction

The aim of this article is to identify the presence of the works of Giacomo Leopardi, one of the most important Italian authors of the 19th century, in James Joyce's masterpieces. James Joyce had a strong connection with Italy, especially with some of its most famous poets, writers and philosophers. As Federico Sabatini (2012: 2) states "Joyce had been reading Leopardi since 1901 as part of his university course and, later, according to Richard Ellmann, his Triestine library held a copy of Leopardi's *Poesie*." Therefore, it can be affirmed that even before the arrival of James and Nora Joyce in Italy, in their "Bella Trieste," the Irish writer had read and appreciated many works of some of the most important Italian poets and writers.

It cannot be affirmed that Leopardi had a "influence" on an author like James Joyce. One of the main characteristics of his works is intertextuality: Joyce, in fact, directly or indirectly alludes to numerous authors belonging to different eras and cultural backgrounds. Garry Leonard, commenting in Joyce's constant references to William Blake in his works, writes: "in my discussion, from time to time, I argue that Blake directly influenced Joyce's work. More often, I argue that the ideas of Blake are analogous to Joyce's thematic concerns and that, while direct influence cannot be proven, comparison does illuminate Joyce's text" (Leonard cited in Cout 2018: 11). These words appear to be valid not only when referring to Joyce and Blake, but also to all other authors, including Leopardi, who constitute a 'ghostly presence' within Joyce's works.

Joyce, as it can be read in a direct reference in his essay "James Clarence Mangan," admires Leopardi because he was able to write lyrics of enormous literary value even when overwhelmed by illness and continuous physical and psychological illnesses. Joyce considered Leopardi even superior to Mangan, as the Irish poet was "weaker than Leopardi, for he has not the courage of his own despair" (Joyce cited in Sabatini 2012: 2). But Joyce's appreciation of Leopardi was also due to his political commitment, as politically committed was an intellectual like Mangan. In fact, in addition to philosophical-speculative Idylls, Leopardi "wrote a number of critical and committed poems devoted to the social, political and religious situation of Italy" (Sabatini 2012:4).

In *To Italy* (*All'Italia*), as well as in other important Leopardi's *Canti*, we can clearly understand how the poet was afflicted by the political situation of Italy, not yet a united nation and governed by a foreign ruling class, who only pursued its own

interests. This poem was underestimated by Francesco De Sanctis, while Giosuè Carducci "praised it not only for the patriotism it conveyed, but also for its technical density" (Campana 2014: 69).

Leopardi and Joyce's ambivalent attitude towards Romanticism

Leopardi, in his *Canti* and in other works such as like *Operette Morali*, criticized not only the Italian ruling class, but also some Italian Romantic intellectuals with whom Leopardi had a relationship full of contrasts. Arnaldo Di Benedetto (2016:494) states that "according to some scholars, the belief that Leopardi was a romantic intellectual would be alive and widespread among the critics. Allow me some doubts about it."Undoubtedly, there are many important scholars who consider Leopardi to belong entirely to the Italian Romanticism, such as Francesco Flora (1940) and Walter Binni (1984), however, there are many other scholars who totally disagree with this vision of Leopardi as a Romantic intellectual, including the most important of all, Sebastiano Timpanaro (1969). Emilio Bigi also states that the poet from Recanati has "neither an attitude of indiscriminate adherence nor of total rejection" towards Romanticism (Bigi cited in Di Benedetto 2016: 495). In fact, if in Leopardi's poetics there are many elements that present romantic traits, but the criticism against some intellectuals belonging to this literary movement, as stated earlier, was widespread. Di Benedetto points out (2016: 496) that "Leopardi always distanced from the first Italian romantics; he was also almost indifferent to the greatest of them: Alessandro Manzoni. And there also was a mutual hatred between Leopardi and Niccolò Tommaseo."

Modern intellectuals are criticized in Joyce's masterpieces as well, especially for their "materialism." If Leopardi states that the intellectuals of his time have totally lost the original contact with nature and with the true moral values that characterized ancient society," in a beautiful essay, entitled "The Universal Literary Influence of the Renaissance," James Joyce wrote: "should we then conclude that present day materialism, which descends in a direct line from the Renaissance, atrophies the spiritual faculties of man, impedes his development, blunts his keenness?" (Joyce cited in Berrone 1976: 14).

Leopardi's reception in the Anglo-American context

Why was one of the major Italian authors like Giacomo Leopardi, one of the most famous Italian modern writers, not well known and appreciated in Anglo-American cultural circles? In this regard Peter Lecouras (2009: 314), states that "Leopardi's reputation in England was intermittent and inconclusive from 1837 to at least 1880." The scholar points out that the first to "export" Leopardi to England was Giuseppe Mazzini, who in 1837 wrote an article in Westminster Review. Mazzini, in his article, although he did not doubt the artistic value of Leopardi's *Canti*, accuses the

author "of hesitating between imitation and innovation" (Mazzini cited in Lecouras 2009: 316). Actually, the differences between the Victorian society and the Italian context where Leopardi was born and where he lived are numerous, and probably "Victorian expectations, governed as they were by the dominance of Wordsworth and perhaps Tennyson, made Leopardi's reception difficult by even the most committed readers of poetry" (Lecouras 2009: 314).

However, if it is true that Lewes, talks about an "admiring disapproval" (cited in Lecouras 2009: 317) of the English Victorian society towards him, there are other scholars who seem to appreciate the value of his works. Two of the most important of these scholars are Matthew Arnold (1966) and Geoffrey Bickersteth who, on the occasion of the Annual Italian Lecture at the Proceedings of the British Academy, compares the two authors in a contribution entitled *Leopardi and Wordsworth* (1927), and he puts "both poets on equal terms and explained why both were of equivalent importance to their respective cultures, granting them equal poetic and philosophical billing" (Lecouras 2009: 313). As Bickersteth argues, as Leopardi lived in the shadow of Alessandro Manzoni, Wordsworth also lived in Byron's shadow, though he was certainly much more popular at the time of his death in 1850 than Leopardi was when he died in Naples in 1837 (Lecouras 2009: 319).

Regarding Leopardi, therefore, we can read about the conflicting feelings of the critics, who on the one hand cannot deny his enormous literary value, on the other hand they do not believe that his melancholia and his apparent pessimism, in a first phase of his life defined as "historical" and later as "cosmic," could interest and become part of a society like the Victorian one.

The first scholar who fully recognized Leopardi's value in England was Anna Merivale, who compares the literary value of Leopardi to that of Ugo Foscolo, a great Italian neoclassic and "preromantic" writer and poet. The scholar, in her anthology of modern Italian poetry, inscribes nine poems she herself translated by Leopardi. According to Anna Merivale, "Leopardi is deeply penetrated with the querulous, ironical, melancholy views of life, characteristic of modern skepticism" (Merivale 1863:615 in Lecouras 2009:319).

Leaning on the banisters, listening…

Analyzing James Joyce's *The Dead* in comparison with some of Leopardi's *Canti* and in particular with *Infinity* (*L'infinito*), we can find some similarities:

This lonely hill was always dear to me,
And this hedgerow, which cuts off the view
Of so much of the last horizon.
But sitting here and gazing, I can see
Beyond, in my mind's eye, unending spaces
And superhuman silences, and depthless calm,

Till what I feel is almost fear.
(Leopardi 2010: 183)

In the composition, Leopardi immediately (v.1-2) presents two physical boundaries to his readers, the hill and the hedgerow, beyond which the mind can only go through the imagination. Although aware of their finiteness, people, "sitting here and gazing," will try to cross those limits, or better, they will 'beguile' themselves to be able to do it (in this translation of the Italian text we read I can see/beyond, but a better translation, in this case, of the Italian 'io nel pensier mi fingo' would be 'I beguile myself'). So, in this way, people's minds will generate what Leopardi calls 'illusions.'"

What has been said cannot be fully understood if we do not also read one of Leopardi's most famous *Operette Morali*: *Dialogue of Torquato Tasso and His Familiar Spirit* (*Dialogo di Torquato Tasso e del suo genio familiare*), where the poet illustrates very clearly the theory of pleasure. When the Spirit asks Torquato Tasso, a poet who represented a model for Leopardi as well as for many other Italian authors, what pleasure is and what its definition is, he replies: "a desire, not a fact: a feeling that men conceive with thought and does not experience; or more to the point, is a concept and not a feeling" (Leopardi 2017: 85). However, the poet is aware that his finite sense will never be able to reach the infinity because it does not exist, at least in nature.

In lines 13 and 14 ("so my mind sinks in this immensity:// and foundering is sweet in such a sea"), in fact, it is only the poet's thought who "drowns" in infinite spaces overcoming any boundary of space and time: and the last verse, one of the most beautiful of Italian literature, Leopardi unexpectedly reveals to his readers that his mind and soul's shipwreck is sweet to him. Pietro Citati, in a biography that he dedicates to the poet from Recanati, affirms: "In the Infinite there is not the slightest trace of pain: but a sweetness, a detachment, an indifference, an intellectual candor, which he never reached again in his life" (Citati2010:174).

But "sitting and gazing" as Leopardi does in verse 4 of the poem, Gabriel Conroy also seems to want to cross the threshold of infinity. However, in *The Dead* the reader finds himself in a space of terrible desolation, where shipwrecking is anything but sweet. In fact, Gabriel, at the end of the party at the house of his aunts Kate and Julia Morkan, watches his wife that takes her coat from the upstairs wardrobe. Gretta "was leaning on the banisters, listening to something. Gabriel was surprised at her stillness and strained his ear to listen also"(Joyce 2014: 182). Brendan O Hehir states that: "he cannot make out what she is listening to, but thinks of her as posed for a picture he would call 'Distant Music,' little suspecting how distant from him she is" (O Hehir 1957: 10).

That sweet melody takes Gabriel's wife to a space and time so far from those of her husband, although physically she will still be destined to be by his side. That music, the beautiful song "Lass of Aughrim," allows her to reunite spiritually with her beloved Michael Furey, no longer belonging to the realm of the living. Just the memory, which flashes vividly in Gretta's mind, is enough to make the concepts of

space and time change. And Gabriel still does not know that he, too, willingly or unwillingly, will find himself crossing the boundaries of time with his mind.

After the story of Gretta and of her still obscure past, Gabriel looks at the snow out of the window of the Gresham Hotel's room, his silence almost screams, deafening the reader. It takes readers far, to that realm of the dead where Michael Furey resides, who is now more alive than ever. It takes us to the far West: "His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead" (Joyce 2014: 194). Gabriel's identity was almost fading away in a gray and elusive world, even more gray and elusive than the kingdom of his rival, Michael. It seems to capture, in that heartbreaking silence, Gabriel's shipwreck and the realization that perhaps he had experienced an illusion: being able to control even what was obviously not in his power.

Even Gabriel's feelings towards Ireland changed in that moment. To use Ellmann's words:

> Gabriel, who has been sick of his own county, finds himself drawn inevitably into a silent tribute to it of much more consequence than his spoken tribute to the party he has had illusions of the rightness of a way of life that should be outside of Ireland; but through this experience with his wife he grants a kind of bondage, of acceptance, even of admiration to a part of the country and a way of life that are most Irish. Ireland is shown to be stronger, more intense than he. (1982:250)

The last of his silences, therefore, expresses his infinite fears, infinite solitude and awareness of not being invincible, but of having to surrender, even to the dead.

Conclusions

Although these similarities between Leopardi and Joyce have often gone unnoticed, it can be affirmed that the two authors share several common themes. As already stated, we cannot speak of a real influence that Leopardi had on Joyce, but an example can be given of how the two authors use symbols similarly in their works. For example, Leopardi was always fascinated by the image of the moon. The presence of the moon is constant in Leopardi's *Canti*, and appears to the reader with different aspects.

The image of the moon is taken up by Homer, who, in the 7th book of the *Iliad* (that Leopardi read at the age of eleven), makes an interesting contrast between the feeling of happiness that a shepherd feels in his soul when he observes the motionless moon (which appear to be immersed in an infinite space) and the devastation of the battlefields where the Greeks and Trojans face each other. So, the contemplation of the moon, both in Homer and in Leopardi, is capable of bringing peace. Furthermore, especially in the early *Canti*, the moon will also be a symbol of clarity and purity. A

few years later, however, the calm, in Leopardi, will take on strong melancholic connotations.

Between 1829 and 1830, Leopardi wrote *Night- Song of a Wandering Shepherd of A*sia (*Canto notturno di un pastore errante dell'Asia*). The poet asks questions to that silent spectator, even if he is aware that he will never receive an answer from that "foreigner who belongs neither to our land nor to our cosmos." (Citati 2010: 119). The moon becomes an "accomplice" in the moral isolation of the shepherd, who seems paralyzed like Gabriel who looks at the snow.

The snow seems to freeze Gabriel Conroy's heart and soul, it annihilates him and seems to enhance his paralysis. From the window of that room, Gabriel, like Leopardi, will find that feeling of enormous desolation only warmed, perhaps, by the tears on the man's face. And the snow continues to fall regardless of the misfortunes of men.

In conclusion, this article focused on the criticism of Romanticism and on the representation of the Infinite in their works, but Giacomo Leopardi and James Joyce share some thematic and linguistic similarities that would be worthy of being studied and deepened by critics in the future.

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MOBY-DICK: THE DERRIDEAN CHAIN OF SIGNIFICATION IN HERMAN MELVILLE'S DOUBLOON

Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* is – by all means – an expansive book, as "from the very opening it conveys a sense of abundance, of high creative power, that exhilarates and enlarges the imagination" (Kazin 2012: 1), a fact which explains the ever-present fascination with the work to this day. It has generated an overbearingly postmodernist body of criticism in order to account for the impossibility of endowing *Moby-Dick* with a singular and idiosyncratic line of interpretation. In this direction, "The Doubloon" is a particularly relevant chapter. The chapter takes place soon after Pip's tragic desertion at sea and his consequent loss of mind, and it explores the matter of the Spanish gold coin nailed to the mast by Captain Ahab soon after the sail of the Pequod, a coin promised as a reward for whoever first spies the whale. As eight different characters – out of which I will discuss three – attempt to make sense of the doubloon along their own subjective ontological lines, the doubloon "shows how interpretations can proliferate until signs become so laden with subjective meanings as to preclude any shared understanding" (Lee 2006: 402). My claim is that the doubloon is a highly ambiguous and – at times – paradoxical symbol that is endowed with a twofold purpose inside Melville's vision, in accordance with the Derridean *différance* that dictates the coexistence of "a rupture and a redoubling" (Derrida 1978: 278) at the heart of its structure.

On the one hand, the doubloon has a fixed origin, as a subjective cipher that shows how "reality has been reduced to the content of one's perceptions" (Cromphout 1979: 11) since each character uses it as a signifier that allows them to make sense of the hostile environment, as well as the instability of their existence aboard the Pequod. On the other hand, it is an all-encompassing system of representation, formed of various disunities and revealing a ruling, immanent signification – with transcendental and prophetical powers – gleaned by Pip at the end in his chanting rhythm: "I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look" (Melville 2012: 504). The freeplay of subjective interpretations inside the doubloon evades any "point of presence" or "fixed origin" *inside* its body of signification (Derrida 1978: 278), since its center does not belong to the totality, and as Derrida (1978: 279) says, the structure itself "has its center elsewhere" as a slippery sign that denotes the slippery meaning of the whale itself (inside Roland Barthes's second-order semiological system, where the doubloon would represent a *concept* of Moby Dick). In other words, the doubloon needs a center that would control the overplay of subjective significations thrown into it by the characters, but it is equally prone to be controlled by an outer prophetical force, that exists independently of the will of the characters.

To begin with, the first to speak in the chapter is Ishmael, who merely describes the coin and alludes to some of its symbols, which are solar in origin. The coin itself is "a graven image of the sun" (Sten 2006: 417), forged in the sunlit Republic of Ecuador and carved with the sign of judgment, Libra, or the scales: "Now this doubloon was of purest, virgin gold. . . every sunrise found the doubloon where the sunset last left it. . . Now those noble golden coins of South America are as medals of the sun and tropic token-pieces" (Melville 2012: 499).

In the novel, there are many instances of contrasting images of light and darkness, as well as of natural light (the sun) that represents vitality and the true knowledge, and artificial light (most notably, the whale oil lamp), which is associated with the hellish flames of malignity and monomania. The coin, too, is an artificial source of light; the coin is a mirror, which "reflects back the subjective state of the observer who looks at it, as it reflects back Ahab's egotism" (Sten 2006: 417). John F. Birk (cited in Gallop 2019: 26-27) notes that the three peaks engraved on it are symbolic of the three masts of the ship and – by extension – of the three powers in the novel: Ahab is the fiery volcano, the whale has a "tail like a Lima tower," and the narrator Ishmael is the crowing cock. The coin is ultimately a generator of meaning since, as Pip remarks, all are "one fire to unscrew it," that is, to unlock and "restore vitality and meaning to their lives" (Sten 2006: 418).

According to Derrida (1978: 279), "coherence in contradiction expresses the force of a desire" and "the concept of centered structure is in fact the concept of a freeplay based on a fundamental ground, a freeplay which is constituted upon a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which is itself beyond the reach of the freeplay." It is clear that characters assign meaning based on this 'reassuring certitude' that what they see in the doubloon is real and this is what provides them with a sense of reliability before the forces of destiny.

Quite tellingly, the modes of assigning meaning of the two main characters are distinctly opposed. For Ishmael, objects reveal themselves as empty containers of meaning, expecting the subject to ascribe them a subjective, temporary significance (Gallop 2019: 11). Unlike Ahab, Ishmael knows that "all is inconclusive, restless, an endless flow of meaning" (Kazin 2012: 6), which assures him that any attempt at reaching beyond one's subjectivity into the realm of objectivity is futile (Gallop 2019: 15). Ishmael instantiates the man who wishes not to interrogate nature – as he is aware it does not answer back, so he provides it instead with a meaning that remains relevant inside the self-enclosed space of the subject, never to reach out into the world to appropriate truth.

On the other hand, Captain Ahab sees objects as overflowing containers filled with divine significance. When Ahab attempts to understand, his journey to significance has the violence of laying claim to final truth (Gallop 2019: 17). This aggressive mode of significance is marked by existential anxiety, as Ahab violently demands: "How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall?" (Melville 2012: 191), and as he threatens: "Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I'd strike

the sun if it insulted me" (Melville 2012: 192). Both are instances of revolt against the incomprehensibility of the world, materialized in his monomaniac quest for the white whale. Ishmael, upon observing Ahab's scrutiny of the doubloon, remarks that "he seemed to be newly attracted by the strange figures and inscriptions stamped on it, as though now for the first time beginning to interpret for himself in some monomaniac way whatever significance might lurk in them" (Melville 2012: 499).

Ahab's search for meaning is based on the inherent, "lurking," existence of a meaning which must be brought to light (Gallop 2019: 25). Ahab embodies a solipsistic mode of generating meaning, as he sees his very own reflection in the doubloon, whose "round globe is but the image of the rounder globe, which, like a magician's glass, to each and every man in turn but mirrors back his own mysterious self" (Melville 2012: 501). His epistemology describes Ahab as "the monomaniac captain expanding his vision until it encompasses all things; he represents himself as the very geographical features of the doubloon, and by extension as the world itself" (Lammers 1995: 29). By emptying the doubloon of meaning and restoring himself inside it, Ahab seeks Derrida's "twisting return toward the already-there of a meaning" (Derrida cited in Larson 1995: 4) and thus forcefully "to transform the doubloon and the cosmos into a typological schema which is Ahab-centric" (Larson 1995: 4). He says: "look here, - three peaks as proud as Lucifer. The firm tower, that is Ahab; the volcano, that is Ahab; the courageous, the undaunted, and victorious fowl, that, too, is Ahab; all are Ahab" (Melville 2012: 500).

This solipsistic affirmation of meaning has its source in an ontological anxiety, since, as Derrida (1978: 279) says, "anxiety is invariably the result of a certain mode of being implicated in the game, of being caught by the game, of being as it were from the very beginning at stake in the game." In Ahab's world, hermeneutics is replaced with a corporeal body of desire (Larson 1995: 20), in which the world becomes Ahab's own body. What is implied in Ahab's words seems to be not the question of "What do things mean?" but instead, "Why am I not attached to those meanings - why am I separate from the very reality I am therefore forced to know?" (Cameron cited in Lammers 1995: 76). Ahab reads the coin in such an assuring way that it completes the details of his mission: since he is 'stuck in the game,' he must believe in the self-made certainty of his meeting with Moby Dick after a season of storms, in accordance with Fedallah's prophecy. His forceful reading and "self-enclosed individualism" will finally bring disaster both upon itself and upon his crew (Matthiessen cited in Lammers 1995: 31).

Derrida (1978: 279) explains that the whole history of the concept of structure, after its decentring, is a "series of substitutions of center for center, as a linked chain of determinations of the center," and both Ishmael's and Ahab's hermeneutic suggestions for a center only serve the purpose of substituting one center for another, without reaching stability. These meanings are successive "surrogates" for a center, and due to this constant sign-permutation, the center lost its stability (Derrida 1978: 280). It is no longer "a fixed locus but a function" (Derrida 1978: 280).

This function is to be expressed through language and discourse, which is a mission assigned to Pip. He is considered to be a human carrier of invaluable prophetic knowledge by Ahab. If until now, the doubloon has been endowed with relative and reflective meanings that would point to a certain comforting suggestion that "subjectivity is self-fulfilling, particularly when indeterminate signs offer so many interpretive possibilities" (Lee 2006: 406), Pip comes to represent the absolute system of prophetic language inherent to the doubloon-signifier, and he reveals its transcendental signified which, through its apparent absence, provides the outer stability of the doubloon's hermeneutic structure. In his chant of "I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look" (Melville 2012: 504), Pip articulates through language the inherent system of differences inhabiting the doubloon and he implies that reality resides not in the coin by itself, but rather in the overarching dialogism of created meaning: "Here's the ship's navel, this doubloon here, and they are all one fire to unscrew it. But, unscrew your navel, and what's the consequence? Then again, if it stays here, that is ugly, too, for when aught's nailed to the mast it's a sign that things grow desperate" (Melville 2012: 505).

Quite aptly, Pip associates the golden coin with the 'ship's navel,' a mythological reference to the Navel of the World – the axis mundi, the link between the high and the low realms. The Navel of the World is thus contained within the coin, which is why Ahab, by owning it, hopes to be endowed with the grace and power to subdue death and to unlock the magical door of vitality in his quest to subdue what exists beneath the Navel, which is according to Joseph Campbell (1986 cited in Sten 418) "the cosmic serpent, the dragon, symbolical of the waters of the abyss." The narrator speaks of how "the doubloon was set apart and sanctified to one awe-striking end; and however wanton in their sailor ways, one and all, the mariners revered it as the white whale's talisman" (Melville 2012: 500). The signified of the doubloon-sign is represented by a series of distorted permutations of subjective meaning, but inside the dimension of Barthes's myth, it earns a new signified, as it becomes a *concept*, clearly standing in for the white whale itself. Thus the doubloon *is* the white whale. The center or navel of the sign of Libra signifies Balance and the center of all meaning, and it ensures "equilibrium and stasis" (Seelye cited in Gallop 2019: 41). The crew are quite eager to 'unscrew' the doubloon, that is, to receive it as a reward for spotting Moby Dick, but on a deeper level, the doubloon is a haunting reminder for Ahab, of his monomaniac quest: the massacre of the while whale. However, Pip asks: "But, unscrew your navel, and what's the consequence?," clearly pointing to certain malevolent consequences of the rupture of the triadic sign, as well as the impossibility of the act. He foresees Ahab's end in the fight, which is meant to end with Ahab's body being 'nailed' to the mast by the whale in the same way Ahab had nailed the coin. As a central object attracting various interpretations and *containing* them in its core, its unscrewing would mean the definitive collapse of the structure of signification, and the death of all individuals involved.

It comes as no surprise that Ishmael is the only one to survive the whale, since he was the sole member to allow the doubloon to run its processes without throwing inside its structure yet another subjective interpretation that would threaten its already throbbing instability. The alternative to its unscrewing, that is, the doubloon remaining in place, is "ugly too" (Melville 2012: 505). Quite significantly, the second side of the coin, which the crew do not see, features the Roman goddess Libertas. Thus, Pip's assertion that the existence of anything in the doubloon's place is "a sign that things grow desperate" (Melville 2012: 505) shows that no matter how impossible the mission, challenging the incomprehensible is admirable; this is Pip's acknowledgment of Ahab's heroism in his undaunted fight for freedom. Ahab is indeed a hero, albeit a damned one. To fight against a divine covenant that stripped man of the ability to comprehend the very world he inhabits is the ultimate definition of the American hero, as envisioned by Melville. Ahab's quest can be seen as "humanely understandable," as he is the man attempting "by terrible force, to reassert man's place in nature" (Kazin 2012: 8). One can note that in spite of the sail being doomed for failure from the very beginning, the least that can be done by any individual is to challenge that which cannot be conquered, and it is this which defines Ahab's nobility.

Finally, the end of Pip's vision heralds the Pequod's watery end and links it to the fires of hell, the general resurrection to follow, and to the biblical grapes of God's wrath – symbols of the divine punishment of evildoing and, in the context of the novel, of those who push the boundaries of their human condition inside the chain of existence: "God goes 'mong the worlds blackberrying. Cook! ho, cook! and cook us!" (Melville 2012: 505).

To conclude, one can recall another of Melville's characters, Redburn, who confesses: "I began to see, that my prospects of seeing the world as a sailor were, after all, but very doubtful; for sailors only go round the world, without going into it" (Melville cited in Cromphout 1979: 1). The doubloon is representative of "an experience of the void that leads to a heightened experience of the self" (Cromphout 1979: 6) which points to the interpretation of the object-signifier as – alike the book itself – a coming-to-grips with an uncertain world of ambiguity and paradox. The Derridean decentering serves to embody the very freeplay at the heart of a seemingly stable sign, as the doubloon accommodates, on the one hand, a multiplicity and a dialogism of subjective interpretations which co-exist inside of it, and, on the other, an overarching ruling signification with prophetical powers, a transcendental signified which remains invisible but nonetheless *significant* in the unfolding prophecy of doom.

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