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OSCAR WILDE'S *THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY*: IDENTITY AND THE GOTHIC DOUBLE AT THE FIN DE SIÈCLE

Doubles are part of everyday reality, they are everywhere around us, in the grand scheme of the universe. The structure of reality needs the binary form in order to exist and expand: cells divide, most animals have a bilaterally symmetric body, there are binary stars and magnetic fields; and, why not, twins. When it comes to people, there has always been this obsessive desire to find one's 'other half,' a desire which in our Western culture has its origins in Plato's *Symposium*, where the gods cut the eight limbed human in two halves. The *New Age* movement talks about 'twin flames,' the same identical energy that is distributed into two separate bodies; while folklore and literature, on the other hand, discuss the notion of the 'doppelgänger,' one's coexisting physical or internal double. The following paper will focus on the doppelgänger/gothic double in Fin de Siècle literature, and will discuss whether the role of the double is to shape or dissolve one's identity. It will do so by looking at Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

In anthropology, the shadow was the first to be associated with the double. Primitive people believed that injuries inflicted upon one's shadow would also affect the owner. There were superstitions in Germany that stepping upon one's shadow was a sign of death, the shadow being associated with one's own soul; and if a person saw his/her double, it meant that they would soon die, since their own spirit had left their body in advance and it was now coming to warn them (Rank 1989: 49-50).

In literature, the double-theme was first introduced by Romantic writers such as E. T. A. Hoffman, Jean Paul and E. A. Poe. Their works discuss issues regarding the relation of the self with the self, reflections, depersonalizations, imitations, automatons and wax figures. The motif was later adopted by Fin de Siècle writers, such as Robert Louis Stevenson and Oscar Wilde, whose works use the double according to the Decadent philosophy of the time.

The double can be defined in a number of ways. It can be someone who possesses "a likeness which resembles the main character down to the smallest particulars, such as name, voice, and clothing, a likeness which, as though 'stolen from the mirror,' primarily appears to the main character as a reflection" (Rank 1989:33). This means someone who appears to be identical both physically and, to some extent, psychologically to another person. A good

example, in this case, would be Poe's short story *William Wilson*. Or, as Werner (2002:163) argues, the double could be "a second self, or a second existence, usually coexisting in time, but sometimes sequentially, as in soul migration plots… or, more commonly, someone who does not resemble oneself outwardly but embodies some inner truth." What is more, the doppelgänger could be an alien creature inside a person that claims to share their being, but who feels like a foreign body who impersonates them and who has taken possession of them (164), as, for example, in Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde.*

Freud, on the other hand, believes that the doppelgänger should be defined as 'uncanny.' The word that Freud uses for 'uncanny' is the German '*Unheimlich'* (Freud 2003:124), which etymologically corresponds to 'unhomely.' It usually defines something which belongs to "the realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread" (123), but it is that type of frightening which was once familiar to us. His definition of the double is that of two persons who look alike, who experience "spontaneous transmission of mental processes"(141), meaning telepathy, so that they become co-owners of each other's knowledge; also, by identifying with each other, they can become unsure of their true self, or even substitute their own selves: "the self may thus be duplicated, divided and interchanged" (141). And finally, "there is the constant recurrence of the same thing, the repetition of the same facial features, the same characters, the same destinies, the same misdeeds, even the same names…" (141). This suggests a person who appears to have not only identical physical features, but also an identical life with someone, as if they were living their own life twice in the same plane of existence.

But why do doppelgängers really appear, and do they influence one's identity by shaping and defining it; or by dissolving and annihilating it? Is their role that of stealing one's identity, what some would call 'the soul;' or even one's own life? The discussion will further focus on Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray.*

In Wilde's novel, Dorian discovers his double in his portrait painted by a friend, Basil Hallward. The portrait appears to be a perfect replica of Dorian's physical features—it acts almost like a reflection in a mirror. By discovering his 'reflection' in his portrait, Dorian actually discovers 'himself' for the first time.

This situation is very similar to what Lacan defines as 'the mirror stage:' from the age of six months a child can experience in play the relation between his movements in his reflection in a mirror, and reality: his own body. This process is called '*identification,'* which means "a transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image" (Lacan, 2001: 2) or his '*imago.'* In other words, this is the moment when a child becomes aware of his image and self as an autonomous being. Strangely enough, this means that "the first

glimpse of one's identity derives from the actualisation of self as other"(Germanà 2010:100); one discovers his/her identity by being 'other.'

Similarly, Dorian discovers his true identity in the 'imago' depicted in the painting. His true self, both physical and internal, as we shall later see, is exposed to him by identifying himself with the portrait: "A look of joy came into his eyes, as if he had recognized himself for the first time" (Wilde, 1890:40).

The next stage in Dorian's relationship with his double is that of infatuation. The first moment he sees his portrait, Dorian is overwhelmed because "the sense of his own beauty came on him like a revelation. He had never felt it before" (Wilde 1890:40), and he "stood gazing at the shadow of his own loveliness" (Wilde 1890:41-42). This situation, evidently, has narcissistic connotations. Narcissism is defined by Paul Näke (cited in Freud 1991:3) as the attitude of a person who treats his/her own body as if it were a sexual object; who gazes at it and touches it, in order to obtain sexual satisfaction. Freud, on the other hand, explains narcissism as the introversion of the libido, where the libido has been withdrawn from external objects and directed towards the ego, thus giving rise to the 'ego-libido' (Freud 1991: 5).

Dorian's actions can, therefore, be called narcissistic: he often watches his portrait, examines with "minute care, and… terrible delight" (Wilde 1890:142) its lines and texture; and "once, in boyish mockery of Narcissus, he had kissed, or feigned to kiss, those painted lips that now smiled so cruelly at him. Morning after morning he had sat before the portrait wondering at its beauty, almost enamoured of it, as it seemed to him at times" (Wilde 1890:117). He, evidently, treats his own portrait as a love-object.

Moreover, Freud further argues that narcissism is strongly related to homosexuality. He believes that homosexuals, when choosing their love-objects, are influenced by the fact that in infancy they took as a model not their mother, but their own selves: "They are plainly seeking themselves as a love-object, and are exhibiting a type of object-choice which must be termed 'narcissistic'" (Freud 1991: 18). Consequently, Dorian's sexual relationships with young men are proof of his sexual deviation, and are explained by Otto Rank as "attempts to realize the erotic infatuation with his own youthful image" (Rank, 1989:71) deriving from a narcissistic fixation with his own ego.

The second stage in Dorian's relationship with his double is that of rejection. He discovers that the portrait has the ability to expose on its surface Dorian's inner conflicts, 'sins,' and the depraved life he is now living. Moreover, the portrait has taken upon itself Dorian's aging process, offering him the chance of remaining always young – a desire that Dorian mentions at the beginning of the novel; and he realizes that the portrait, "as it had revealed to him his own body, so it would reveal to him his own soul" (Wilde 1890:118).

But the true conflict between Dorian and his double arises when he realizes that the portrait has had an evil influence upon himself— so strong, that it has pushed him into becoming "something vile and degraded" (Wilde 1890:164); even more, into killing Hallward. As Rank observes, when the hero comes to that point when he cannot accept responsibility of his actions any longer, he decides to place it upon another ego, a double. And since he tries to protect himself from the pursuits of himself, he is driven towards his own death: "It is in the painless form of slaying a different ego: an unconscious illusion of the splitting-off of a bad, culpable ego—a separation which, moreover appears to be the precondition for every suicide" (Rank 1989: 79).

Similarly, Dorian decides to destroy his own portrait. Believing that in this way he would free himself, he stabs and rips the canvas. But in that moment, he falls dead with a cry, taking upon his body the aging features of the portrait. The novel ends in the fashion of Poe's *William Wilson*: "In me didst thou exist – and, in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself" (Poe 1839). By killing the double, the hero has killed himself.

We could now argue that the double appears when there is a shift in social order, or when the hero experiences an inner conflict. As Rank (1989: 76) observes, "the mental conflict creates the double which corresponds to a projection of inner turmoil." As in Dorian's case, the connection between him and his double is made in the moment he experiences inner anguish and fear of aging. The apparition of his double makes possible the projection of Dorian's fears upon the portrait and, in this way, helps him achieve complete liberation: be that physical, moral, or mental.

In trying to answer the question whether the double shapes or dissolves one's identity, we could choose the first option: indeed, it helps one shape, define, and discover one's true identity. Even if in many doppelgänger stories the double appears to have an evil influence upon the hero, its true mission is to show him/her their true self, their true inner conflicts, vulnerabilities, addictions, obsessions, predispositions, and, of course, their own evil side. And this can be seen as a way of helping one understand where they stand, who they really are, and what there is that they need to change or improve. As Werner (2002: 164) argues, "these alters relate to your innermost, secret self, and act epiphanically to unveil you to the world—and to yourself." As in the case of Dorian, the portrait has the ability to bring to the surface his own evil deeds, thoughts, and feelings. It acts as a perfect mirror of his inner and outer life. By rejecting his double, he actually rejects his true, 'unpolished' self.

We can conclude by saying that the double or doppelgänger belongs to the 'uncanny,' and it can provoke a state of uneasiness, or even fear. Acting as one's twin, alter ego, clone, or reflection, it can be perceived as a negative

element, belonging to the Gothic, and it can cause confusion when it comes to one's identity. However, as we have seen in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the role of the double can also be understood as that of an outer projection of one's own self, which is meant to provide them with a better understanding of who they truly are.

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HOLLYWOOD & THE AMERICAN PRESIDENT: A MATCH MADE IN HEAVEN?

Often described as "the most powerful man in the world," the President of the United States, alongside the imagery associated with his figure (the White House, Air Force One, Marine One, Cadillac One etc.), has become iconic and is instantly recognizable around the world. Wherever and whenever the President of the United States makes an appearance, especially overseas, it instantly becomes headline news. Over time, Hollywood has capitalized on this growing worldwide importance and recognisability of the figure of the President of the United States by making the President a main character in a number of films, each trying to showcase a different dimension of the President's expected or unexpected personality traits. Numerous real-life Presidents of the United States have had their legacy and icon status enhanced by being depicted in Hollywood films, such as Abraham Lincoln in *Lincoln* (2012), Richard Nixon in *Nixon* (1995) and *Frost/Nixon* (2008), or Bill Clinton in *The Special Relationship* (2010). However, this essay will focus on fictional Presidents because, by analysing a character who is the creation of fiction and not a representation of someone who has lived and breathed, the aspects relating to the person's background before he became President are no longer of interest and thus one may focus entirely on the character in his position of President and the way he fits into what is normally expected of him.

Because he is leading the most powerful nation in the world, the figure of the President of the United States is one of utmost importance. As popular American historian Kenneth C. Davis puts it, "the president has been the central character of the drama of the nation's history, for better or for worse" (2012: xii). The fact that Davis uses the word "drama" here seems entirely appropriate in the context of such an analysis as the present one. Indeed, the President is normally depicted in Hollywood films when a "drama" of some kind in unfolding, be it a hostage situation, an alien invasion, an act of terror or a romantic scandal. And because the President is the one in charge of solving this "drama," his possessing the adequate traits of character to do so is vital. Davis provides a list of such traits of character: "consistency of principles and message, strength of character, willingness to compromise when necessary and

consistent with principles, recognizing talent and being surrounded by it without surrendering to it, willingness to listen, communication skills, humour and a human touch" (2012: xvii).

Furthermore, because the presidency is a "national mirror" and because Hollywood has recognized "the symbolic of the office," it "has opted to focus on the character issue and to subordinate any domestic and foreign policy matters [after the Second World War]" (Rollins & O'Connor 2005: 252). For this analysis, I have chosen three films from the '90s which deal with this 'character issue' in terms of the figure of the (fictional) President of the United States: *Dave* (1993), *The American President* (1995) and *Air Force One* (1997).

The romantic comedy *Dave*, directed by Ivan Reitman, is a film about a normal American who becomes the President of the United States overnight. In other words, one can say that a regular U.S citizen, Dave Kovic (Kevin Kline) has fulfilled his American Dream by taking a faster route. Dave's adventure begins when several Secret Service agents ask him to act as a double for the president, having to leave through the front entrance of a hotel while the actual president will sneak out through the back door. This scenario takes a dramatic turn when Bill Mitchell, the real president, suffers a stroke while sleeping with his secretary. The White House Chief Of Staff, Bob Alexander (Frank Langella), and the White House Communications Director, Alan Reed (Kevin Dunn), convince Dave to fill in for the president until he recovers, so as not to make the general public worried. From this moment on, Dave Kovic becomes Bill Mitchell and, more importantly, the President of the United States.

Up to this point, one can identify in the film several distinct images of the American President. Before being replaced by Dave Kovic, Bill Mitchell appears as a tough, patrician, heartless person who knows everything about manipulation and how to look good in front of the American public. However, this image of Bill Mitchell is not the real one, as the President will appear in scenes which reveal a yet undisclosed dimension of his character, one which contrasts with the normal character and behaviour expected of a president. One of these scenes is that in which the most powerful man in the world is cheating on his wife, an act that normal people do not expect from a president because he is not supposed to have such human weaknesses. Actually, the role of a president does not imply any weaknesses. Before the end of the film, one can also learn that President Mitchell has even done various illegal deeds.

A new and improved presidential image can be found in the person of Dave Kovic, an image that conveys most of the traits enumerated by Davis: the new President shows strength of character and willingness to compromise when necessary; furthermore, he is also consistent with his principles in that he chooses to renounce the presidency precisely because that was the best solution for the good of the country. In order to be the President's double and later

replace him, Dave had to prove a certain amount of 'willingness to listen' and also a number of various communication skills that stopped him from raising any suspicions. Nonetheless, the most evident trait that also functions as an important improvement of the presidential figure was the 'human touch' that helped Dave cultivate a closer relationship with his people, in the sense that the President became popular without necessarily wanting and needing this. Although this film does not intend to raise serious and urgent questions regarding the image of the President of the United States, but only wishes to entertain those who watch it, it succeeds in showing that there is always room for better, even in the Oval Office.

Another presidential typology is shaped in *The American President*, a comedy-drama love story directed by Rob Reiner. The film tells the story of a widowed United States president and a lobbyist who fall in love. President Andrew Shepherd (Michael Douglas) starts to date Sydney Ellen Wade (Annette Benning), even though this could cause serious political damage to his re-election campaign. President Shepherd is willing neither to give up his love for Sydney nor to let the American people and his staff down. Besides focusing on this 'conflict' between the statesman and the private individual, the film also adds a political conflict to the mix, which doubles the romantic conflict, as Shepherd has to choose between sending his own crime control bill to Congress or Sydney Wade's environmental bill. In the end, it is Sydney Wade who manages to secure votes for her bill, while Shepherd is left three votes short.

The image of a President that should not have any weaknesses or a human dimension exposed to the public present in *Dave* is also echoed in *The American President*. The President actively tries to separate his private life from his public one, but the question is raised whether the two can really be separated in the case of the President of the United States. While his staff worries about the polls and his adversaries attack his personal life, Shepherd defends his privacy: "This is not the business of the American people." Knowing that personal behaviour, character, and the presidency are inevitably interconnected, the chief of staff (Martin Sheen) counters: "The American people have a way of making the things they want their business" (Rollins & O'Connor 2005: 259).

It is by admitting to his relationship with Sydney Wade in front of the nation that Shepherd secures an unexpected level of popularity at the end of the film, thus promoting the 'human touch' and 'willingness to compromise' mentioned by Davis (2012: xvii).

The President's 'strength of character' can be encountered at numerous points in the film, when his ability to lead the nation is tested. This strength is evident in that "Michael Douglas walks and talks like a man in charge. He is decisive and aggressive" (Rollins & O'Connor 2005: 259). In fact, this capacity to

lead is evident even from the character's surname (Shepherd). The importance of 'strength of character' in the case of the President of the United States is directly mentioned by Shepherd when he defends his relationship with Sydney Wade in a press conference in front of the nation: "Being President of this country is completely about character" (Rollins & O'Connor 2005: 260).

Moving to an entirely different genre, that of the blockbuster action film, this paper will analyse Wolfgang Petersen's *Air Force One,* which places significant emphasis on the President as a person who is not afraid to take matters into his own hands when Air Force One (one of the most important symbols of the United States) is hijacked in mid-flight. The aim of the hijackers is to force President James Marshall (Harrison Ford) to release from prison the leader of a former terrorist regime in Kazakhstan. As is well known, "the United States does not negotiate with terrorists," and President Marshall has just delivered a strong speech against terrorism in Moscow, so there is a lot more at stake than the threat towards the President's life posed by the hijackers: the President's "consistency of principles and message" mentioned by Davis (2012: xvii). Thus Marshall must literally fight his way out of this dangerous situation and rescue the rest of those held captive by the hijackers at the same time. The image of a strong President is yet again present in the case of James Marshall, as he is "the last man left on the plane who has the wits and strength to defeat a cruel adversary [Gary Oldman] in hand-to-hand combat" (Rollins & O'Connor 2005: 226).

In addition to showing that he possesses 'strength of character' and is 'consistent in principles and message,' James Marshall also proves that he has the 'willingness to listen' to those in the White House Situation Room led by the Vice President, who aid him in his singular effort to regain control of Air Force One. The strong and competent figure of Vice President Kathryn Bennett (Glenn Close) also suggests that James Marshall also has the capacity to 'recognize talent and be surrounded by it' (Davis 2012: xvii).

Besides character and plot, the three films in question also resort to other ways of portraying the President of the United States as the ideal figure that he should be, such as cinematography. While *Dave* and *The American President* make use of light and warm colours, making the President's figure appear even more sympathetic and appealing, the case of *Air Force One* is drastically different. In order to highlight the President's capacity of maintaining his rationality and strength during a crisis situation, the feeling of danger is amplified by the use of dark and cold colours, numerous shadows and the long takes depicting the plane's corridors, all foregrounding the claustrophobic nature of the enclosed space of the aircraft.

All in all, the presidents depicted in these three Hollywood films possess the majority of the traits of character enlisted by Davis (2012: xvii) that may be

used to build a portrait of an 'ideal' President of the United States. Thus, they adequately fulfil their role as 'commander-in-chief' and wholly achieve what is expected of them. These films make American audiences feel even more proud of their nation and they give international audiences a possible explanation as to why the United States of America is still considered to be 'the most powerful nation on Earth:' because it is led by 'the most powerful man in the world.'

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LOLITA: WAYS OF TELLING THE STORY

Movie versions of famous novels seem to elicit similar reactions from viewers who have read the book before seeing its adaptation. A favourite line, which seems to have become a set phrase among such persons, is "The book was better!" One cannot help but wonder what makes every book better than its adaptation. What are the criteria by which the book is judged to be better? Oftentimes what upsets the avid reader is the fact that the movie does not follow the novel faithfully. Are we to understand that the highest merit that an adaptation can have is faithful translation from one medium to the other, i.e. from words to images?

Presumably to show awareness of this common reaction, the tagline of the poster which announced the release of Stanley Kubrick's movie version of *Lolita* in 1962 ran: "How did they ever make a movie of *Lolita*?" Nabokov's eponymous novel, after having encountered considerable trouble, had been published in 1955 and had become notorious for its so-called pornographic qualities. To adapt for the silver screen a story about a middle-aged man who marries a woman just to be able to sexually abuse her twelve-year-old daughter seemed to pose even more problems in conservative 1950s and 1960s America than the adaptation of a better-behaved novel did. The aim of the present paper is to answer the question of how a movie was made of Nabokov's *Lolita,* i.e. how Kubrick tackled the various problems he encountered in transferring the story of the novel into a different medium and what the result was. It will be argued that *Lolita* (the movie) can be seen as an interpretation of Nabokov's novel and this interpretation along with the above-mentioned restrictions shifted the initial focus of the story *Lolita,* resulting in a work in which Humbert Humbert is the victim and Lolita is the victimizer. This will require us to break the issues posed by the adaptation into two categories: restrictions imposed by outer circumstances and restrictions imposed by the differences in the two media.

In order to decide what issues the adaptation of *Lolita* to film might have posed, we must first give a definition to adaptation and establish its aims. Adaptation criticism so far seems to have developed in two main directions: one which stresses the importance of fidelity and judges adaptations by their

ability to render the literary work as faithfully as possible, and one which sees adaptation as interpretation. Given the fact that knowing the exact perspective and intention of the author of a literary work is impossible and so is literal translation from one medium to another, I hold with the definition given to adaptation by Neil Sinyard in *Filming Literature* (1986):

> [Adaptation is] best approached as an activity of literary criticism, not a pictorialisation of the complete novel, but a *critical essay* [of the original literary text] which stresses what it sees as the main theme**.** (117)

Thus, Kubrick's *Lolita* can be seen as an interpretation of Nabokov's novel. This interpretation along with the above-mentioned restrictions shifted the initial focus of the story *Lolita,* resulting in a work that is distinct from the novel it is based on.

The way in which Kubrick interpreted Nabokov's *Lolita* is hinted at in interviews in which he discusses the difficulties he faced while making the movie. In "An Interview with Stanley Kubrick" (1969) by Joseph Gelmis he states the following:

> I believe I didn't sufficiently dramatize the erotic aspect of Humbert's relationship with Lolita, and because his sexual obsession was only barely hinted at, many people guessed too quickly that Humbert was in love with Lolita. Whereas in the novel this comes as a discovery at the end, when she is no longer a nymphet but a dowdy, pregnant suburban housewife; and it's this encounter, and his sudden realization of his love, that is one of the most poignant elements of the story (Kubrick in Gelmis 1969).

This suggests that Kubrick interpreted Humbert Humbert's love for *Lolita* as being the main issue foregrounded by the novel. The movie uses several cinematic techniques, which will be discussed later in this paper, to render this main theme as it was interpreted by the director. This rendering is sometimes hindered by the aforementioned challenges that this particular adaptation implies.

One of the main problems in adapting Nabokov's novel was censorship. The pressure to adhere to codes of decency came from the Catholic Legion of Decency and the MPAA. Commenting upon this Kubrick later stated that had he "realized how severe the limitations were going to be, [he] probably wouldn't have made the film" (Kubrick in Corliss 1994: 12). Censorship forced him to cut out any sexually suggestive scenes between Lolita and Humbert. Moreover, the definition that Nabokov gave to nymphets in the novel and which Kubrick was planning to render in voice-over in the movie was not allowed by the censors. The effect of this was that Humbert's passion for Lolita

was endowed with a uniqueness that excuses Humbert for his transgression: he is no longer seen as an older man who prefers young girls but a man who loves one young girl.

Another challenge that the director of *Lolita* had to face was using the script that Nabokov had written for the movie. Even though Kubrick used a highly abridged version of the initial script, it was not completely his own. Despite the fact that Kubrick tried to keep his wishes in mind, Nabokov was unhappy with the way the movie turned out because the movie did not preserve the author's prose style, leaving out most intertextual references and metatextuality and using excessive humour. Later, he commented that that the "author's goal of infinite fidelity" may be a "producer's ruin" (Nabokov in Stam 1992: 61) and commended Kubrick's work.

Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Lolita* has often been called a literary masterpiece and the author's style has received high praise. Alfred Appel Jr. states that "*Lolita* is surely the most allusive and linguistically playful novel in English since *Ulysses* (1922) and *Finnegans Wake* (1939)" (Appel, 1991: xi). Kubrick has been accused of failing to render the prose style that amounts for a great part of the novels success. Robert Stam notes that "While the novel constantly flaunts its own status as linguistic artefact, the film is largely cast in the illusionistic mould, presenting rounded characters in plausible settings through a self-effacing style" and that, even though it is intermittently parodic (it references Poe, other movies by Kubrick, *The Curse of Frankenstein,* etc.), the film is never as effective as the novel (1991). In his article "Words and Movies", Kubrick answered such accusations:

> People have asked me how it is possible to make a film out of *Lolita* when so much of the quality of the book depends on Nabokov's prose style. But to take the prose style as any more than just a part of a great book is simply misunderstanding just what a great book is. Of course, the quality of the writing is one of the elements that make a novel great. But this quality is a result of the quality of the writer's obsession with his subject…. Style is what an artist uses to fascinate the beholder in order to convey to him his feelings and emotions and thoughts. These are what have to be dramatized, not the style. The dramatizing has to find a style of its own, as it will do if it really grasps the content (1961: 14).

Whether or not Kubrick managed to render Nabokov's prose style is irrelevant if we consider film adaptation a form of literary criticism. Kubrick does indeed manage to find a style of his own for his *Lolita,* one shown by the differences between the novel and its adaptation.

The differences between the novel and its adaptation can be accounted for in two ways: changes caused by Kubrick's interpretation of the book and

changes required by the medium. These sometimes overlap in the sense that Kubrick sometimes tries to find equivalents of Nabokov's techniques. One of the changes required by the new medium is the shift from the first person point of view to the third person limited. The 1st person perspective of Nabokov's novel increases the sympathy of the reader for Humbert Humbert – his charm seems to nullify his many faults. The 3rd person perspective of the film provides a more detached view on Humbert Humbert. To make up for the faults of this perspective, Kubrick uses two methods. The first one is the more predictable of the two: voice-over. Humbert sometimes offers his thoughts on the situation at hand, as for example in the beginning of the movie, when he explains his status in America or when he is plotting Charlotte's murder. The second method Kubrick uses is degrading the other characters. Charlotte and Quilty are turned into caricatures: Charlotte is turned into a desperate middle-class philistine and Quilty into a slapstick-like character. Lolita herself loses some of her charm, appearing in the movie often in her brat guise. These characters fail to win any sympathy from the viewer, unlike Humbert who constantly seems to be a victim of their plotting.

Connected to the point of view dictated by film is its dependence on dialogue (or less often on monologue) to reveal character. Kubrick makes great use of dialogue, using a sort of double entendre within the lines of Humbert Humbert. Thus, the character's duality is portrayed – he is a gentleman and a pedophile at the same time. For instance, while he is playing chess with Charlotte, Humbert lets her know that she will indeed steal her queen and steals a glance in the direction of Lolita. This technique is also used in the novel on many occasions, revealing Humbert's dual personality.

Another change required by the new medium concerns length. Naturally, movies are attributed a certain runtime limit and this did not permit the filming of every scene in the book. This problem is partly solved by the fact that film allows simultaneous action, i.e. dialogue and narrative description occur at the same time, as opposed to textual narrative. Kubrick also addresses this issue by incorporating several scenes from the novel into a single one. For example, the scene which shows Charlotte and Humbert as newlyweds also offers insight into Humbert's musings of murdering his wife and explains the history of the gun Humbert will later use to kill Quilty. In the novel, these scenes are different from one another and appear far apart from each other.

A further restriction imposed by the medium of film seems to be its inability to translate metaphorical language. However, Kubrick frequently manages to find equivalent visual images to metaphors. A great example is the transposition of the novel's famous beginning:

> Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul. Lo-lee-ta: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate to tap, at three, on the teeth. Lo. Lee. Ta. (Nabokov 1991: 9).

In the adaptation, a similar opening of the story is offered. Humbert Humbert is shown carefully painting Lolita's toenails. This image shows almost the same type of adoration and tenderness the passage taken from the novel shows. At another point in the novel Humbert Humbert comments: "I had ceased to be Humbert the Hound, the sad-eyed degenerate cur clasping the boot that would presently kick him away" (Nabokov 1991: 60). A similar image of discarded animal is put forth in the movie when the scene shifts from a close-up of Humbert's lusting face to that of Frankenstein. When Humbert murders Quilty in the movie, he does not in fact shoot him; he shoots a painting of a young girl behind which Quilty is hiding. This is reminiscent of the song Humbert sings to Lolita when he tries to seduce her: "And the gun I killed you with, O my Carmen/ The gun I am holding now" (Nabokov 1991: 62). Both elements suggest Humbert's guilt when it comes to the young girl.

Such effective imagery is used to overcome the limits on content imposed by censorship, too. Sexuality is delivered through the use of suggestion. Several scenes are proof of that. For example, the sexual affair between Quilty and Charlotte is conveyed in the scene of the dance in which she whispers something into his ear to which he retorts with a smirk: "Did I do that, did I?" Humbert Humbert's desire for Lolita is shown in the scene of the hula-hoop, her movement exhibiting a high degree of sexuality. When Humbert is seduced by Lolita, suggestion is used to point to the sexual intercourse that is about to take place: the nymphet smiles slyly and whispers into her step-father's ear the sort of game that she would like to play, after which the scene fades out.

Some of the differences between the novel and the movie can be explained as showing the director's interpretation of the novel. This accounts for the type of humour used in the movie and the change of the essential features of some of the characters. Both Nabokov's and Kubrick's *Lolita* are humorous, but in different ways. Robert Stam observes that: `

> Most of the Nabokovian wit is displaced onto Peter Sellers as Clare Quilty, for Sellers' shape-shifting capacity to mimic personages as diverse as Gabby Hayes and T.S. Eliot makes him an ambulatory intertext, a body of quotations whose very modus operandi is parodic in the best Nabokovian sense. (Stam, 1991)

Stam argues that Nabokovian wit focuses more on self-parody, self-deprecation and his "jokes primarily take the form of 'incongruity-ambiguity humour,' in which the ambiguity of a single term (or multiple terms) results in

the juxtaposition of two incongruous worlds of meaning" (Wepler, 2011), i.e. is essentially verbal humour. While Nabokovian humour is mainly verbal, Kubrick's humour is one of forms and movements (e.g. Quilty's disguises or the scene with the cot at the hotel) as well as verbal (Humbert's and Quilty's speeches are good examples of verbal humour). However, if Humbert Humbert is the joker in the novel (and often the butt of the joke at the same time), in the movie he seems to be more often than not the butt of jokes made by others, especially by Quilty and Lolita.

Many of Nabokov's characters are reinterpreted in the adaptation. Charlotte and Quilty, as they were discussed above, John and Jean Farlow, Lolita's friends are some of them. The most striking reinterpretation remains, however, Lolita herself. In the novel, even though we only get the perspective of Humbert, we get glimpses of her many-sided personality. This is evident even from the second paragraph:

> She was Lo, plain Lo, in the morning, standing four feet ten in one sock. She was Lola in slacks. She was Dolly at school. She was Dolores on the dotted line. But in my arms she was always Lolita. (Nabokov, 1991: 9)

Lolita is not only a devilish nymphet, but also a child: sleepy, a schoolgirl, or naughty. Later in the novel, along with her blackmailing and moody side, the reader is shown a darker side of her personality which was negatively influenced by Humbert Humbert's abuse:

> I happened to glimpse from the bathroom, through a chance combination of mirror aslant and door ajar, a look on her face... that look I cannot exactly describe... an expression of helplessness so perfect that it seemed to grade into one of rather comfortable inanity just because this was the very limit of injustice and frustration and every limit presupposes something beyond it hence the neutral illumination. And bear in mind that these were the raised eyebrows and parted lips of a child. (Nabokov, 1991: 283)

On the other hand, the Lolita of the movie is one-sided: she is the temptress. She is almost always in control so that it seems that Humbert Humbert is the one who is abused. This is perhaps suggested by the fact that Sue Lyon, the actress who played Lolita, looked older than twelve. She often wears high-heeled shoes and provocative dresses, unlike the Lolita of the book who is dressed as a child most of the time.

Towards the end of the novel, Humbert Humbert utters a strikingly honest-sounding confession, acknowledging his guilt: "I loved you. I was a pentapod monster, but I loved you. I was despicable and brutal, and turpid, and everything, mais je t'aimais, je t'aimais!" (Nabokov, 1991: 283) This affirms

once again the duality of Humbert Humbert's character. It seems that, indeed, one of the novel's main points is Humbert's love for Lolita. At the same time, it seems difficult to separate his love from his self-proclaimed monster-qualities. The latter are brought less into focus in the movie so that Kubrick's interpretation of the novel along with changes required by the medium shift the role of victim: Lolita is no longer seen as a victim but as a victimizer. Partly due to Kubrick's interpretation of the novel but also because of the changes required by the medium and outer circumstances, the role of victim is attributed to Humbert Humbert. The viewer of the movie tends to sympathize with Humbert as he is the gentlemanly protector who is tortured by his love for a seductress, namely Lolita.

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THE AMERICAN DREAM AND THE SYMBOLISM OF FITZGERALD'S FICTION IN *THE GREAT GATSBY*

The phrase 'the American Dream' is one that is widely used, but probably less widely understood. The American Dream is a concept used by people to define the kind of life that, generally, immigrants coming to the USA dreamt of, a life which includes love, wealth, a high rank and being able to make use of the power provided by prosperity and an honourable situation in a good society, a position which could be reached only through hard work. This concept began to have a more common use after the Declaration of Independence, instituted on the 4th of July 1776, which stated that people are endowed with "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness," but soon this ideal was turned into a corrupt notion, embodying only the materialistic side of life.

After the First World War, people started buying things which could prove the opulence of the newly rich, thus creating a deeper social gap between the two classes. The upper class disapproved of the equality tendencies of the newly rich and adopted a superior attitude towards the people who did not have the same old-family tradition. This was the time of the prohibition, when poor people started smuggling alcohol and dabbling in organized crime, just like Jay Gatsby or Meyer Wolfsheim or, in real life, the famous mobsters of those times, such as Lucky Luciano, Joe Bonanno, Frank Costello, Tommy Lucchese, Tommy Gagliano, Salvatore Maranzano, or Al Capone used to do.

Francis Scott Fitzgerald's novel, *The Great Gatsby,* is a pertinent exemplification of the corruption of the American Dream by replacing the honest and innocent search for love and an honourable position in the society by working hard, with the mad chase after as many possessions and as much money as possible, sticking to the belief that money can buy love and happiness.

Jay Gatsby is the main character of the novel and was born in a penniless family, which prevented him from marrying the woman he loved. He was thus determined to attain the wealth and power that could draw Daisy's attention, his former lover, now married to a wealthy man, Tom Buchanan. Obsessed with his ardent desire to become worthy of Daisy, Gatsby takes a wrong decision

which leads him straight to failure. We witness Jay Gatsby's assiduous and futile struggle to be like the East Eggers, although he lives in West Egg. From the very beginning, he makes a wrong move, for he claims that he descends from a rich family, from whom he has inherited all of his fortune, and that he was a prominent student at Oxford University. Then he makes another mistake on his winding way towards achieving his biggest goal: his money stems from illegal activities, such as bootlegging, which are against the virtues promoted by the original concept of American Dream, i.e. a chaste, upright and hard-working man. Gatsby's desperate need to impress Daisy brings about inconvenient and sad circumstances because he engages in a dangerous game, allowing completely unknown people, who don't even know who their host is, to attend his parties; he is anxious to climb the social ladder, to regain the mischievous Daisy, who never belonged to him. Gatsby's alienation from the society has a tragic end, because he will not be accepted among the prestigious and aristocratic families living in East Egg. He treats Daisy as if she were perfection, but he has to cope with the consequences of his stubbornness, because he cannnot comprehend that the baseness of the person he has turned his adoration to is what ruins his dream and hope, which are destined to crumble away, culminating in Gatsby's death. His dream is destroyed because he is consumed by his despair to revive an already buried past and by his greed.

Daisy represents the main reason for Gatsby's decline. Although apparently a sweet, affectionate and frail woman, she is in fact a selfish, conceited and insensitive person. Gatsby is rather attracted to her life than to the woman Daisy Buchanan, as he makes a relevant statement "her voice was full of money." She has been compared to the mermaids known to seduce the sailors with their song in the story of Ulysses and this is exactly what she does: she entices Gatsby with her fascinating voice. Daisy is far from reaching the ideal of the American woman; she unintentionally commits homicide, killing her husband's mistress, Myrtle Wilson, and she remorselessly allows Gatsby to claim this abominable deed as his own. It couldn't have happened in any other way because of Daisy's shallowness and the fact that she avoids taking risks. She chooses to live in the moment and to have no long term aims. She cheats on Tom with Jay Gatsby, although she intends to stand by her husband, not caring about Gatsby's fate, she does not even attend his funeral. She is part of Gatsby's American Dream.

The marriage of the Buchanans also stands for the failure of the American Dream, because they are miserable together and each of them tries to find love with someone else. They still stick together; their only concern is to have a careless existence, no matter what they have to do in order to achieve it, thus illustrating the effect that money can have on someone who only cares

about the material side of life and does not show any trace of compassion for their fellow men. Tom Buchanan was born to a rich family, not having to work for anything in his life. He even regards Daisy as one of his possessions and he is not willing to let her go. But Tom seems not to be contented with having only one woman, he is eager to have two and the solution is Myrtle Wilson. He makes use of the power he has, taking advantage of Myrtle's ambition to become a member of the aristocracy. Tom is a cunning man because he uses George Wilson to get rid of Jay Gatsby, controlling him like a puppet, and making Gatsby seem like the murderer of Wilson's wife. Just like Daisy does, he only cares about his own welfare to the detriment of the others.

Myrtle Wilson is also on the pursuit of the American Dream. Married to George Wilson, she lives in the "Valley of Ashes," where poor people live. Using her sexuality, she desperately tries to attain the recognition and privileges of the upper class, which makes her snobbish and affected behaviour seem rather ridiculous, boorish and exaggerated. She chooses the easy way to get what she wants, hating Daisy for crossing her path, undervaluing her husband's sincere affection. Her dream is a common and admirable one, for she wants to rise above her present social status; but she is to blame for how she follows it, with the help of her affair with Tom. Her American Dream will be ruined because she cannot find a suitable and respectable way to fulfil it.

Jordan Baker is a fussy haughty young woman, who is also a wealthy and thin golf-player and Daisy's friend. The two of them are so much alike, because Jordan is also indifferent to other people's needs or problems. She even treats Gatsby like an object, like "something" not "someone," encouraging and supporting Daisy in her affair with Jay Gatsby. She thinks that Daisy needs to be entertained somehow. Jordan is said to have moved the golf ball once during a tournament so that she could win and this is how she behaves in her personal life. Even Nick Carraway describes Jordan as being "dishonest." She also stands for the type of people who attend Gatsby's parties, i.e. she enjoys his kindness, but never shows any consideration for him. Not having a solid foundation and being built in a shady way, her American Dream could fall apart at any second.

Nick Carraway is actually the engaged narrator. He comes from the Midwest to New York because he feels the urge to make a change in his life after he has returned from the battlefield of the First World War. He has opposing feelings towards Gatsby, because he does not approve of Gatsby's ambition and corruption, but he still admires Jay Gatsby for being a good and kind man, capable of noble feelings. Nick is the only one who knows the truth about Gatsby's past social and material status, yet he chooses to be his friend, his only real and sincere friend. Nick can be regarded as the anchor of loyalty, frankness and integrity in a world of betrayal, lies, corruption and shallowness.

He is close to fulfilling his American Dream because he focuses his attention on feelings and family rather than on prosperity and attaining success.

The eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg play a significant role in what the development of the story is concerned, for they are often referred to throughout the novel. The pair of blue eyes, which are framed by some glasses and looking down upon the Valley of Ashes, can be regarded as being some sort of a guardian All-knowing instance, something like George Orwell's Big Brother in *1984*: "Big Brother is watching you." Actually, the eyes of the doctor are associated with the palpable existence of God, watching over the rotten and corrupt souls of the inhabitants of that particular area. This should serve as a reassurance that God knows that they have traded or would trade their pure ideals for money and other material advantages. It looks like George Wilson is the only one who is aware of this fact, when he warns Myrtle that God sees and knows everything.

The green light is another important symbol in the novel and it conveys Jay Gatsby's hope to recover Daisy, the woman who bears the name of a flower with a yellow centre and yellow stands for corruption, it actually represents his idea of the American Dream. It could be also regarded as being a symbol for the uncertainty of the future, because the light is not a strong one, on the contrary, it can barely be spotted. The source of this light is located in the East Egg, where the aristocracy live, and green could also mean financial stability or a sign of a new era, which is either a drawback or an advantage.

The Valley of Ashes is regarded as being a sort of a no man's land (Lee 2012: 15), located between New York City and the West Egg, and it is where poor people with precarious financial resources live. Their life seems to have no sense and they are suffocated by the large amount of ashes existing there and they are pining for a better life, yet they are not capable of leaving that region. There is nothing green growing in the Valley of Ashes, which is why it is associated with death. This idea can be illustrated by the example of Myrtle Wilson, who dies in a car accident on the road while she is on her way out of her house. This Valley has been associated with T. S. Eliot's Waste Land (X-Kit 2005: 18), a barren region, where nothing grows and even the souls of its inhabitants are empty. People living here do not have a good social status, they are mistreated by the ones living in East Egg, but some of them still try to overcome their social status like Myrtle Wilson does and fails in her attempt.

Every honourable and wealthy man had to have a car. Jay Gatsby has a car and Tom Buchanan also has one, but their tastes differ even with regard to the cars they own. They both drive expensive cars. Gatsby drives a yellow car, which is equipped with the latest technology, whereas Tom owns a fine and sophisticated one. Owing a car also meant "having an apparent freedom," a sweet feeling of independence.

When Nick Carraway attends one of Gatsby's parties, without having met him yet, he enters Gatsby's library and spots an old man, whom he calls "the owl-eyed man," paging through his books and making a stunning remark about the pages of these books: they are uncut. This means that Jay Gatsby has created a fake image about himself in front of the others, wanting to seem educated and cultivated, a man who reads a lot.

The owl-eyed man resembles, as his name suggests it, an owl, which is a symbol for death. Just like Herta Müller's *Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt* (*The Passport*), where at first they have to deal with an old owl and then with a new and young one, that lacks experience; this situation creates panic among the villagers, because they expected a lot of deaths, due to the fact that the young owl would "travel" carelessly from one roof to another, foretelling the death of someone living in that particular house. If we regard the owl-eyed man from this perspective, he is the foreteller of Myrtle's and Gatsby's death, he anticipates their fate, from the moment he appears, we know that someone is going to die at a certain point in the novel.

Alongside the way the characters act and think, the destruction of the American Dream can be proved with the help of the different symbols which can be encountered throughout the novel. Although the novel may be perceived as being a simple love story or one about the glamorous society of the 1920s, it offers, in fact, a clear view of the degradation and decay of the concept of the American Dream, deepened by the social and economic consequences caused by the end of the First World War. There is a thin line between achieving or failing in the attempt of fulfilling the American Dream, this is why only few people manage to grasp its true meaning and put it into practice. It's hard, but not impossible.

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THE ANGLO-SAXON TOPIC IN THE POETRY OF JORGE LUIS BORGES

As Anglo-Saxon literature is considered to be "the oldest of the vernacular literatures of modern Europe" (Earle 2007: 1), its rippling effect across centuries of not only European, but worldwide literature cannot be denied. Due to its seminal nature, Anglo-Saxon poetry and its topics have been constantly recycled across literary trends, various writers attempting to recreate its verse or its overall mood. Such a writer was Jorge Luis Borges, who used his extensive knowledge of Germanic literatures (and Anglo-Saxon literature in particular), gained after a period of lifelong study, to write poetry either in true Anglo-Saxon style or by including Germanic/Anglo-Saxon topics and symbols and, hence, making reference to the entire Anglo-Saxon body of literary works.

This essay seeks to analyse the way in which Anglo-Saxon topics are depicted in the poetry of Jorge Luis Borges by considering two sample texts. The two poems to be analysed are different in that one (*A Saxon AD 449*) is written in more traditional verse, using rhythm and rhyme, while the other (*Fragment*) is written in blank verse, but resorts to repetitions and alliterations, in typical Anglo-Saxon fashion. The English translation used in the analysis is my own. I have used the original Spanish version as the source text (Borges 1974) and I have also consulted the Romanian translation of these poems (Borges 2005).

As previously mentioned, Borges's connection to Anglo-Saxon literature was not an ordinary one. It seems that his first encounter with Germanic literature occurred during his childhood, when his paternal grandmother, an English lady who had moved to Argentina in her youth, used to tell him stories of the heroic battles of the Saxons, Vikings and Celts (Williamson 2008: 65-66). This initial fascination would continue to grow into his adult years, when he became so dedicated to the study of Anglo-Saxon literature that he started learning Old English just to be able to read *Beowulf*, the Eddas, sagas and legends in their original form. As he later confessed during an interview in 1968:

> There's another thing I would like to mention, and that is that time passes differently when one has lost one's sight... Now I have to manage differently.

> I've got quite a good memory and I began learning Old English in 1955, when I could no longer read. Since then I've held a seminar in Old English for a small group of students. Once I got them to draw on the blackboard in the National Library the two runic letters representing the sound /th/ in Anglo-Saxon. I know hundreds of lines of Anglo-Saxon verse by heart, but I couldn't clearly imagine the page they were written on (Borges in Toswell 2010: 1).

It was precisely this deep knowledge of Anglo-Saxon verse and its background which helped produce Borges's own poetry, in which he made numerous references to Old Germanic culture; he wrote odes to Snorri Sturluson, the author of the *Prose Edda* and to the poet who wrote *Battle of Brunanburth* and *Beowulf* is echoed extensively in various poems (Toswell 2010).

The first poem to be analysed, *A Saxon (AD 449)* is composed of nine four-line stanzas, with end rhymes (see Appendix for full text). The year written between brackets is significant for two reasons: it is the approximate date when Vortigern, the king of the Britons, formed an alliance with Hengist and Horsa, the chieftains of the Jutes who led the Anglo-Saxon invasion of Britain, and it is also the first year to be documented by the so-called 'Saxon Chronicles', which "offer one of the best examples (…) of history written while the impression made by the events was still fresh," as they range from AD 449 to 1154 (Earle 2007: 138).

The first stanza of the poem describes a "tough and red-haired man" who has just arrived "at dawn" on the shores of Britain and sets foot on the "dune of endless fine sand." This man is the first Saxon to arrive in Britain and the "dawn" mentioned is not only the time of his arrival, but also the dawn of modern civilization in Britain. The 'white lands' he sees "further beyond the pale bay" in the second stanza represent territories yet unconquered, territories that still need to be explored and tamed. The adjective "white" also suggests the morning mist covering the land, a reference to the "dawn" previously mentioned.

From this point on, the poem focuses on the Saxon's background. He is described as "tenacious," a trait which, through metonymy, can be attributed to his entire kin. His "fortune" (to be read here as both material wealth and cultural heritage) has been made with the help of "oars, nets," which alludes to the well-known aspect that the Anglo-Saxons, as well as other Germanic peoples, had an entire culture built around the sea, as reflected in Old English poems such as *The Wanderer* or *The Seafarer*. The "oars" symbolise navigation, while the "nets" suggest the fact that the Saxons knew how to reap the benefits of the sea. By contrast, the next element to be mentioned is the "plough," which highlights a number of aspects: the fact that the Saxons also knew how to profit from the land, but also clearly separates them from Barbarians, as the latter had

no interest in cultivating the land. The "sword and shield" reveal the two fundamental dimensions of war: to conquer and to guard what is yours or what you have conquered. These two symbols are also interesting to interpret given the context of the previously mentioned invasion led by Hengist and Horsa. The "tough fighting hand" is an addition to the war-related symbolism of the poem; it is this hand which inscribes "with iron," a reference to the instrument used, a "hopeful rune," which alludes not only to Anglo-Saxon writing in general, but may particularly refer to the rune ᛟ, which is associated with property and inheritance.

The Saxon's place of origin is traced back as being a "land of swamps," a clear allusion to the North German Plain from where the Saxons originated. In his coming to "this shore washed by heavy seas," he was accompanied by his "lares," his protective gods. Two names are mentioned here: Woden (or Odin), the leader of the Wild Hunt, the chief deity of the Anglo-Saxons and the presumed ancestor of Hengist and Horsa, and Thunor, the god of thunder. He makes sacrifices to these gods and adorns their statues with "rags and nails" – common religious practices for Germanic peoples. The Germanic concept of *wyrd* ("fate"), a loose parallel of the modern concept of divine intervention, is also referenced here, in that it was the will of the gods that the Saxon reach this shore and make it his own (McNish 2004).

The next stanza touches upon various aspects of Old English literature. It starts by mentioning one of the possible reasons why many of the Old English poems were composed ("written" may prove to be an improper term in many cases): "to sing memories filled with glory". In order to do this, "he had gathered illustrious names;" this is a reference to the surprising poetical nature of many Old English poems due to the range of tropes used. The *kennings* are directly illustrated in the poem: "battles" are both "meeting places for men" and "meeting places for swords gory." Such *kennings* will be employed extensively in the later (given that this poem is set in AD 449) Anglo-Saxon poems such as *Beowulf* (Heaney 2000: xxix; Fulk & Cain 2005: 31).

The most lasting influence that this Saxon has left on the shores of Britain is that of the "essential words" that will stand at the basis of the English language, a language described by employing a *kenning*: "Shakespeare's music." The poem concludes with the other vital contribution that this Saxon will have made to the territory that he has just reached: "In the arduous hills and open plains / It was his children who England bore."

Fragment, the second poem that will be analysed (see Appendix for full text), consists of two stanzas and is centred on Hrunting, the sword which appears in *Beowulf* and which the hero uses in the battle against Grendel's mother. Hrunting is described as "a sword of high repute; a hoarded treasure; its edge was iron; it was damascened with device of coiled twigs; it had never

failed in fight the hand that dared to wield it" (Earle 2007: 94). It can be regarded as the epitome of the sword as it was perceived in Anglo-Saxon culture: "*Beowulf* contains many descriptions of famed swords and their histories. In this warrior culture, a well-made sword was more than a tool—it was a most prized possession, almost an object of veneration, and was passed down from generation to generation" (Bloom 2008: 19). It was also common belief that the sword kept an imprint of the previous owner in it, as it is described in the poem: Hrunting's previous owner, Unferth, failed to defeat Grendel and this is one of the possible reasons why the sword is ineffective when Beowulf uses it.

The fact that Borges entitled the poem *Fragment* may allude to the fact that he wanted this poem to be read as an integral part of *Beowulf*, or a 'fragment' of the poem which was left out. The poem uses extensive repetition of the central symbol: "the sword." Direct references to *Beowulf* are numerous: the sword is "iron forged" and has "runes/ That nobody will ever be able to wholly decipher;" in *Beowulf*, the sword is described as having an "iron blade" with ill-boding patterns" (Heaney 2000: 101). The line "a sword from the Baltics that will be sung in Northumbria" references the fact that *Beowulf*'s action takes place in the Baltic Sea area – Beowulf came from Scandinavia to help Hrothgar, the king of the Danes – but the poem is said to be composed in Northumbria, among many other places (Bloom 2008: 10).

The parallels to *Beowulf* continue, as references are made to both the epic poem's plot and to the general symbolism of the sword as depicted in the epic poem: the sword "will be given from a king to another king," thus alluding to the generational transfer of the sword and its significance, but then "this king will give it to a dream," suggesting that Hrunting has achieved mythical status. Next, it is mentioned that the sword "will be loyal/ Until a time known only to Fate" – the loyalty of the sword was tested in the battle with Grendel's mother and Fate decided that it would not be victorious.

The focus shifts in the second stanza from the "sword" to the "hand" that wields the sword. The structure "a sword for the hand" is repeated before each new relative clause is introduced. The "hand" "will lead the beautiful battle, the sea of men," with the sword being here a symbol of leadership and the battle (with its *kenning* equivalent: "the sea of men") directly referencing the sword's primary use as a weapon in warfare. The fact that the "hand" "will redden the wolf's teeth / And the ruthless beak of the raven" is a direct reference to death on the battlefield by employing the "beasts of battle" motif: ravens, wolves and eagles are mentioned because they were regarded as scavengers of the battlefield (Magoun, Jr. 1955: 83). These "beasts of the battle" also make an appearance in *Beowulf*: "(…) the swept harp/ won't waken warriors, but the raven winging/ darkly over the doomed will have news,/

tidings for the eagle of how he hoked and ate,/ how the wolf and he made short work of the dead" (Heaney 2000: 203).

The sword depicted in this poem is made for a strong hand, one that can kill monsters ("the serpent in its nest of gold") and one that can "conquer a kingdom," but also "lose a kingdom," at the will of Fate. It is "a sword" made "for the hand/ That will topple the forest of spears," again a *kenning*-like image for the battle. And this hand can belong to none other than Beowulf, as revealed in the final line of the poem.

What Jorge Luis Borges has constructed in these two poems (and many others like them) is a revisit of the universe of Old English literature at its best. It is a reminder that Old English literature can still be entertaining for a modern readership and that it can constantly be revisited and approached from a countless number of angles, each one being more interesting and insightful than the previous one.

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Appendix

A Saxon (AD 449)

The crooked moon was no longer at hand;
At dawn, the tough and red-haired man
Barefoot, with a leery step, slowly began
To climb the dune of endless fine sand.

Further beyond the pale bay
White lands he saw, and hillsides darker
In that elemental hour of the day
When God had not yet created colour.

He was tenacious. His fortune was made
By oars, nets, plough, sword and shield;
His tough fighting hand did yield
In stone a hopeful rune, with iron laid.

From a land of swamps he came of late
To this shore washed by heavy seas;
Together with the light of day, Fate
Was caving in, him and his lares

Woden or Thunor; with a clumsy hand
He adorned them with rags and nails
And sacrificed on their altar dales
Horses, dogs, birds, slaves of the land.

To sing memories filled with glory
He had gathered illustrious names;
Meeting places for men were battles,
Meeting places for swords gory.

His world was of magic on the seas,
Of the kings and wolves of Faith
Unforgiving, and of the sacred horror's wraith
Whose lair is in the heart of the pine forests.

He brought the essential words
Of a language that in time would exalt
To Shakespeare's music: metal, salt,
Night, day, water, fire and colours,

Hunger, thirst, sorrow, dream, war,
Death and other human habits;
In the arduous hills and open plains
It was his children who England bore.

Fragment

A sword,
A sword of iron forged in the morning chill,
A sword with runes
That nobody will ever be able to wholly decipher,
A sword from the Baltics that will be sung in Northumbria,
A sword that the poets
Will equal to ice and fire,
A sword that will be given to a king by another king,
And this king will give it to a dream,
A sword that will be loyal
Until a time known only to Fate,
A sword that will enlighten the battle.

A sword for the hand
That will lead the beautiful battle, the sea of men,
A sword for the hand
That will redden the wolf's teeth
And the ruthless beak of the raven,
A sword for the hand
That will kill the serpent in its nest of gold,
A sword for the hand
That will conquer a kingdom and will lose a kingdom,
A sword for the hand
That will topple the forest of spears.
A sword for the hand of Beowulf.