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*SPEAKING*  
*A GLOBAL LANGUAGE*



# GLOBALISED ENGLISH LITERATURE NOW: BETWEEN *LINGUA FRANCA* AND DIASPORA\*

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**Abstract:** *English is undoubtedly the international lingua franca, and this fact has turned it into the vehicle and distinguishing mark of the globalised era in the fields of commerce, politics, diplomacy, general communications and the internet. However, this paper will deal specifically with the challenges faced by English literature in the age of globalisation. This will be done by addressing issues such as: a) the extension of the concept of “English literature” and the ideological, aesthetic and academic conflicts this involves for the compilation of anthologies, for curricular development, for publications, and so forth; b) the nature and development of a “national” versus an “international” or “transnational” literature and its implications in the field of postcoloniality and the “new world order”; and c) the role played in the extension of the concept of English literature by English writers who are part of migrations and diasporas in present-day United Kingdom and how this affects their feelings of being and belonging, their writing itself, and the reception of their works by the media and readers.*

**Keywords:** *diaspora literature, globalisation, lingua franca, literature(s) in English, teaching, translations.*

## 1. Introduction

Globalisation has been with us for some years now, and it has apparently come to stay. As Terry Eagleton has written (2003: 9), “the first glimmerings of what we now know as globalization” were marked by the end

\* Partial versions of this paper have been presented at a number of European conferences, namely the Fourth FINSSE Conference (Helsinki, Finland, 30 November 2007), the Seventeenth PASE Conference (Wrocław, Poland, 9 April 2008), the Eighteenth British and American Studies Conference (Timișoara, Romania, 22 May 2008), and the Thirteenth BSBS Conference (Sofia, Bulgaria, 7 November 2008). I am grateful to the organisers of these conferences, as well as to the audiences who reacted to different versions of this text, for giving me the opportunity to write and discuss with them this paper. Thanks are also due to the Spanish Ministry of Education and Science for the funding provided under the Research Project code HUM2007-63028.

of the process of independence of the former colonies from their European powers, in the late fifties and during the sixties of the twentieth century. The awareness that independence did not imply the possibility for the new countries of really living on their own, of being indeed separate, *independent* from their metropolis, was what triggered off the emergence of post-colonial theory and then globalisation. Raymond Williams, writing in 1976, described this situation with accuracy and clarity in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (159-60):

If imperialism, as normally defined in late nineteenth-century England, is primarily a political system in which colonies are governed from an imperial centre, for economic but also for other reasons held to be important, then the subsequent grant of independence or self-government to these colonies can be described as ... 'the end of imperialism'. On the other hand if imperialism is understood primarily as an economic system of external investment and the penetration and control of markets and sources of raw materials, political changes in the status of colonies or former colonies will not greatly affect description of the continuing economic system as imperialist (qtd. in Holderness and Loughrey, 2006: 31).

Globalisation is, of course, a multi-faceted phenomenon, comprising economics, commerce, politics, and the like. Although we cannot ignore those aspects of globalisation (they are continually with us in our daily lives, every time we watch television, read the papers, or connect ourselves to the Internet), my main concern in this paper will be globalisation in relation to culture, and specifically to literature, to literature in English.

Yet, I cannot embark on the main discussion without first addressing the fact that globalisation and English go together, not only in my title but also in its international conception. The big issue of globalisation, at least from the perspective of Anglicists, is indeed its close link to the development of English as a *lingua franca* (or shall I say *the lingua franca?*). On one count, "English is now spoken in over forty countries as a first language and in over fifty-five countries as a second language" (Graddol, 2001: 47). One effect of this dominant presence of English is the disappearance of many other languages, so English has become a so-called "killer language" or cannibal (Stephanides, 2001: 39).



## 2. Facts and Figures

According to the *Ethnologue* estimate, prepared by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (<http://www.ethnologue.com>), of the six or seven thousand languages existing in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century all over the world, only 10 per cent will survive in the short term. This means that only about 600 languages will probably be spoken in a few generations, as the numbers of their speakers dwindle and the trend is clearly towards their extinction. This is because English is occupying the space in the education system and meeting the needs of communication. Speakers of minority languages will be replacing their native tongues by a national or official language in their own countries, plus English as a supra-national means of communication, provided of course that English does not happen to be the official language of their countries, in which case they will mostly become English monolinguals.

The paradox of these figures is, as linguist David Graddol has explained, that English has decreased in the number of speakers of the language as their mother tongue, because the percentage of the world population that had English as their native language at the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was 9%, whereas the estimate for the year 2050 is around 5%. Other languages, such as Chinese, Spanish, Hindi/Urdu, and Arabic are growing more quickly and their populations of mother-tongue speakers will probably outstrip that of English. Then the perspective is that, around 2050, Chinese will be the first language in number of native speakers and will be followed by a group of four languages, according to Graddol (2001: 48), “of roughly equal size”; and that means that English will have fallen “in the global league tables from second to third or even fourth place”.

Thus, the fact is that nowadays more people speak English as a second language than as native speakers. If we compare figures corresponding to 1950 with estimates for 2050 we can see that the number of L2 users of English has grown from about 250 to 1250 million. Barbara Seidlhofer (2001) has addressed this issue and its consequences for language teaching because, as she argues, English is no longer the property of its native speakers. She naturally rejects the British Government’s allegations that the fact that English has become a global language is “a national achievement” and that its native speakers should “capitalise” on that “advantage” (2001: 42). It is self-evident that a global language is not built by a single government or

a country, as Sue Wright has so clearly proved in her book, *Language Policy and Language Planning. From Nationalism to Globalisation* (2004).

### **3. English — the new lingua franca**

It is now obvious that, in spite of the great efforts made by France to keep French as the *lingua franca* it used to be, results are not positive and French is clearly losing space at the international level. What makes English the new *lingua franca* is not exclusively the development of the former British Empire and the need to use English as the medium of education, national cohesion and nation building in many of their former colonies. While that may explain the spread of English throughout the world and the increase in its L2 users, it would have probably amounted to nothing, in terms of globalisation of the language, if the British Empire had not been replaced by the American Empire, which uses the same language. Sue Wright's words in this respect are clarifying (2004: 155):

English, the lingua franca of British colonialism, did not fade with empire, because the next power that came to dominance in the Western Capitalist world was also English speaking. The same language used by two different states and relying on two different sets of criteria for its lingua franca status entrenched use in a way that differed from lingua francas associated with a single polity. In this English is akin to Latin, which moved from being the language widely used throughout an extensive empire to being the sacred language of a major religion and the lingua franca of knowledge and secular law in medieval Europe. The double provenance of Latin was one factor in the long duration and wide spread of that language.

This parallel with Latin makes Wright predict that global English will be around for a long time, even if the US does not continue to take the lead in the process of globalisation as it now does, but is replaced by another world power (possibly an Asian one). Her arguments are that the number of speakers who use English as their principal (and exclusive, for that matter) vehicle of communication in international trade, science, politics, and so on, is so great that it would be very difficult to change the global status of English:

It might survive because it has become the purveyor of the discourses of the dominating ideologies of Western democracy and neo-liberal free market

Capitalism, the common language of the international scientific community, and the main medium of the new audio-visual and info tech networks whether or not these are US dominated (Wright, 2004: 155).

### 3.1. English in Europe

I have been referring to the situation worldwide, in largely global terms, but if we simply cast a glance around Europe, it becomes clear that the globalisation of English is not merely a consequence of postcolonialism and of the Third World's needs to find an instrument of communication, a national medium for education, for nation building or for strengthening their economic and commercial interests (see Phillipson, 2003). European countries do not have those needs, but they are certainly under the effects of English as a global language.

Irma Taavitsainen (2003) has described the situation of English in this respect in the Nordic countries, perhaps the area that the rest of Europeans have always associated with the highest degree of proficiency in the use of English and where the extension of the language was most pronounced, with the logical exception of the former British colonies. Taavitsainen emphasises that after Finland and Sweden joined the EU in 1995, Nordic countries have fostered the growth of English in this region, thus abandoning the use of "skandinaviska" and Swedish as the common vehicle of communication (Taavitsainen, 2003: 60):

English is used in communication between people in the Nordic countries. English has replaced Swedish and '*skandinaviska*' as the common language, and the strategies of coping with the other Nordic languages in communication are not readily learned or maintained any longer, which again enforces the status of English in communication.

This situation, according to Taavitsainen (2003: 60), has even reached in Finland the extent that "some parents, fluent or bilingual in English, have adopted English as the home language and their children become first-language speakers outside the tradition, with English as a part of their identity repertoire". Graddol (2001: 53) has also referred to the globalising influence of English in a country such as Switzerland, where bilingualism has been traditional and necessary for the attainment of national cohesion and identity. The curious thing here is that in Autumn 2000 there was an attempt by Zurich's educational authorities to make English the "first foreign language"

to be taught from primary school onwards instead of French — which, technically, is not a “foreign language” in Switzerland, as it is naturally another national language of the country and thus an essential instrument for the maintenance of Swiss identity.

In Spain, a multilingual country with four official languages (Castilian or Spanish, Galician, Basque and Catalan), a similar phenomenon is taking place. As Catalan is an official language in Catalonia and students are taught in that language from primary school (Castilian being studied only as a second language), some parents have shown preference for their children to be taught English as their “first foreign language”. That would mean that, in a few generations, there would be Spanish citizens in Catalonia who would have Catalan as their mother tongue, and, as their second language, not Castilian but English. This has important political implications and is already generating fierce controversy in the press and public opinion, but it is nothing new. In connection with this aspect of globalisation (though not with reference to the Catalan situation), Sue Wright (2004: 14) has written: “speakers from the smaller language groups will move from being bilingual in their own language and the national language to being bilingual in their own language and English”.

### **3.2. The return to localism**

This is certainly a paradoxical effect of globalisation, voiced by many authors: the reaction to globalisation in some places is a return to more localism, so as to defend and protect the minority languages and cultures. Nor is there any great mystery about this. As globalisation implies a weakening of national power, at the economic, but also political and cultural levels, regional and minority languages and cultures which have traditionally been repressed by the powerful nation-state are nowadays flourishing without the constraint of the nation-state.

This is happening all over Europe, as we very well know: in Spain, as I have just mentioned, where Catalan, Galician and Basque languages, literary traditions and cultures are being learned, studied and spread widely through education and mass media; and also in other European countries, such as the former Yugoslavia or Czechoslovakia (Wright, 2004: 48-51), whose previous national languages have split into new independent languages (the case of Serbo-Croatian is, I think, well known). The United Kingdom itself is not alien to this phenomenon, as a result of the gradual

devolution of powers to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It is, indeed, a great paradox because globalisation, which should mean less nationalism and more internationalism, is fostering the return to more nationalism. Sue Wright is again correct in her statement (2003: 98):

There is a growing tendency for states to break up into smaller units, with a continuum of political accommodation from limited autonomy through to full secession. Campaigns for the devolution of power are usually attended by a renaissance of interest in regional languages and demands for their reinstatement in the education system, very much in the nationalist mould.

This is roughly the picture of English as a global language, although much more has already been written on English as a *lingua franca* in Europe, its role as a language of communication and as a working language in the European Union and its institutions, as well as the teaching of English in European universities and elsewhere (see Graddol, 2001 and 2006; Jenkins, 2004; MacKenzie, 2003; Phillipson, 2003; Piette, 2004; Seidlhofer, 2001; etc.).

#### **4. Defining “English literature”**

But it is high time I returned to my main issue, English literature in this global context. The first problem we encounter when dealing with the concept of “English Literature” is defining what we are talking about: whether literature written in the English language, or literature written by English authors. Since we are discussing English as a global language, a language that some authors already prefer to call, in the plural, “Englishes” because this globalisation of the language also implies different standards of English (“Euro English” is also a recent coinage: see Graddol, 2001, or Seidlhofer, 2001, as well as D’haen, 2001 for the concept of “Euroliterature” associated with English literature), the most logical meaning to give to the expression “English literature” would certainly be that of literature written in that language. Thus, the new frontiers of English literature would comprise all those works by authors who write in English outside the United Kingdom, people who are not English or British but who use English as their literary language. In that sense, Filipino writers, for instance, would be good examples of the new frontiers of this new English literature.

However, the question is not so easy to solve. If we use the linguistic criterion for the definition of “English literature”, what can we do with national literatures which already have a well defined and established independence, like “American literature”, or others which cannot be denied their own existence and autonomy: Australian literature, Canadian literature, Irish literature, Indian literature, Nigerian literature, etc.? To include all of them under the rubric “English” would surely infuriate many authors and critics, as well as readers, not to mention politicians and demagogues. This interpretation of English literature as comprising Whitman, Faulkner, Toni Morrison, Margaret Atwood, Seamus Heaney, Tagore, Soyinka, etc. would be accused of being “imperialistic” to say the least.

Nevertheless, after the analysis made of the globalisation of English and its role as *lingua franca* in the international sphere, over and above all national boundaries, how can we now defend a view of English literature that corresponds to the nation-states of the nineteenth century? Is English literature the literature exclusively produced in England, considering of course that Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have their own distinctive literary heritage? Jonathan Bate has explained how the first comprehensive histories of English literature (those published by the Cambridge and Oxford University Presses) came to life. He claims that the writing of *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, published in fourteen volumes between 1907 and 1916, was a further development of the almost simultaneous publication, also in fourteen instalments, of *The Cambridge Modern History* (1902-1912).

According to Bate (1998: 12), volume 11 of that series, entitled “The Growth of Nationalities” and covering the period 1845-1870, was instrumental in establishing “the map of the world as it was at the end of the nineteenth century. This was the era of European nation-states”, and he mentions the unification of Italy and of Germany as the best examples. As a consequence of that, Cambridge University Press issued the national literary histories of England, firstly, and of the United States, secondly (*The Cambridge History of American Literature*, 1917-1921).

#### **4.1. Inclusions, exclusions**

An examination of those literary histories, as well as of other canonical examples in the field (Robert E. Spiller’s *Literary History of the United States*, published by Macmillan in 1948; or the unfinished *Oxford History of English*

*Literature* (OHEL), initiated in 1935 by Oxford University Press), shows that the national and historical criteria are dominant, even if there is occasionally a recognition that “literature doesn’t always develop within national boundaries” (Bate, 1998: 13). This cautionary remark (which is not Bate’s but is to be found in the Preface to *The Cambridge History of English Literature*) may perhaps account for some extravagancies, particularly the extreme example cited by Bate of the volume dedicated to the twentieth century in the *Oxford History*, J. I. M. Stewart’s *Eight Modern Writers* (1963).

The author opted for the exclusion of living writers and selected the eight contemporary writers he considered “of unchallengeable importance in the period”, a selection that Bate (1998: 17) comments upon as follows:

These are Hardy, James, Shaw, Conrad, Kipling, Yeats, Joyce and Lawrence. This means that ‘Modern English Literature’ consists of three Irishmen, an American, a Pole, an Indian-born writer, Hardy (whom most would regard as a Victorian), and a Nottinghamshire miner’s son who, despising England and Englishness, lived much of his life abroad. Virginia Woolf gets three passing sentences.

I think this comment is clearly symptomatic of the difficulty of defining English literature in a global context, a difficulty that is not new at all (the book was published in 1963). Who would reject any of these writers for not being “English”? All of them can be found in almost every textbook and anthology of contemporary English literature (perhaps with the exception of Hardy, who would certainly be found more easily in the chapter or volume dealing with the nineteenth century).

Recent histories of literature have had to face this dilemma and have tried to find a way out of it. As Bate also explains, the new *Oxford English Literary History* (OELH), which started publication at the turn of the new century, tries to avoid the term “English literature”, as if it were something of the past, because — Bate says (1998: 18) — it “derives from nineteenth-century notions about both England and Literature which the series aims to question and modify”. Thus, and although it pays due respect to disciplines such as American literature, Australian literature, Caribbean literature, Indian literature, etc., which are easily recognised today as separate fields, Bate claims (1998: 18-19) that the OELH will include many authors who are not English-born or English citizens:

Those Americans who lived and worked in England (e.g. Henry James, T. S. Eliot, Sylvia Plath) are included. So too with Scottish, Irish, Welsh, and 'Commonwealth' writers: where their work has been produced or significantly disseminated in England (e.g. Scott, Yeats, Rushdie), they will be included. Indeed, such figures will be of special importance in many volumes, exactly because their non-English origins often place them in an ambivalent relationship with England. Throughout the series, particular attention will be paid to encounters between native and other traditions.

One of the most interesting volumes already published is volume 13, written by Bruce King and entitled *The Internationalization of English Literature* (2004). The author discusses in his *Introduction* the difficulties of including some writers as "English", particularly those who, as is common today, travel extensively around the world and live part of the time in Britain and another part, for instance, visiting their relatives abroad. He opts for the inclusion of those who have chosen to make England their home since 1948, being careful not to "colonize" again those writers who lived in Britain for a short while, seeking shelter or political asylum from totalitarian regimes in their countries of origin, but who have eventually returned to them and consider themselves, and are considered by others, writers of their "national" literatures.

But many others chose England as their home, and have remained for decades in Britain, or are children of parents who migrated to Britain and, in fact, have been born and bred there. What else are they if not "English writers"? King comments on them and their achievements in the conclusion to the volume and explains that their contribution to the internationalization of English literature "is mostly a change in subject matter and themes" (2004: 323). As he also writes, and this can be easily applied to the concept of globalisation of that literature,

the background to the internationalization of English literature 1948-2000 is that of mass migration as a result of rising expectations, a globalized economy, and the internationalization of the market place, whether for workers or writers. The literature often tells of the process by which people came to England, recall former homes, were at first ill at ease, wanted to be accepted as equals, and eventually felt enough at home to write of individual lives rather than as part of racial and immigrant communities (2004: 324).



Writers such as V. S. Naipaul and his brother Shiva Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi, James Berry, David Dabydeen, Fred D'Aguiar, Buchi Emecheta, Bernardine Evaristo, Romesh Gunesequera, Sunetra Gupta, Abdulrazak Gurnah, Wilson Harris, Kazuo Ishiguro, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Jackie Kay, Andrea Levy, Kamala Markandaya, Timothy Mo, Grace Nichols, Ben Okri, Caryl Phillips, Ravinder Randhawa, Joan Riley, Sam Selvon, Zadie Smith, Meera Syal, or Benjamin Zephaniah, among many others, are included and discussed in this volume. Even if some of them do not live now in England because they have moved to the States or elsewhere, it is unquestionable that they have contributed their works, their new imaginations, to the expansion of the concept of English literature in the contemporary world.

They are not strictly speaking “colonial” or “postcolonial” writers, but writers who live (or have lived) in England and regularly publish or have published there for a long time. They are, in this sense, part of the new “Englishness” or “Britishness” brought about by globalisation and postcolonialism, but at the same time they have become genuine international writers, read worldwide, regardless of their ethnic or national origins, and also of their citizenship and passports.

This tendency towards understanding English literature in a globalised world was envisaged a few years before King by the Caribbean-British writer Caryl Phillips, who in 1997 compiled an anthology of texts entitled *Extravagant Strangers. A Literature of Belonging*. In the preface he explains his criteria for inclusiveness. One group is comprised by “black writers who emerged in the wake of the slave trade” (Phillips, 1997: xi), like Olaudah Equiano; another group is that of “writers who were born in British colonies and were keen, if not altogether contented, observers of Britain” (xi), among whom Phillips includes William Thackeray, Rudyard Kipling and George Orwell. A third group is constituted by the “colonial subjects”, that is, those “subject” writers “who betray a deep desire to ‘belong’ to the mother country” (xi), represented here by authors such as the Caribbean writers C. L. R. James, Samuel Selvon and V. S. Naipaul.

A fourth group included is that of the “descendants of the colonizers and descendants of the colonized” (xii), writers such as Jean Rhys, Doris Lessing, Penelope Lively and William Boyd, but also Salman Rushdie, Linton Kwesi Johnson and Ben Okri. Phillips also adds to his list of “extravagant strangers” T. S. Eliot and Kazuo Ishiguro, “whose work exhibits an

often microscopic concern with the nature of Britishness” (xii), and finally another group constituted by “the writers who, armed with the English language, appear to have moved to the literary centre in order to take part in a cosmopolitan world that is free from the difficulties of either geographical marginalization or political turbulence” (xii); examples of this latter group are Katherine Mansfield, Peter Porter and Christopher Hope.

Phillips is, of course, aware of the difficulty of his task, particularly that of convincing many people about the right of all these writers to be considered “British”. His final remarks in the preface are certainly an echo of what globalisation means in the context of tradition and history for English literature:

One of my hopes in compiling and editing this anthology is that by engaging with the following writers and their work, readers will come to accept that as soon as one defines oneself as ‘British’ one is participating in a centuries-old tradition or cultural exchange, of ethnic and linguistic plurality, as one might expect from a proud nation that could once boast she ruled most of the known world. The evidence collected here confirms that one of the fortuitous by-products of this heterogeneous history has been a vigorous and dynamic literature (xii).

If one also considers the British publishing industry, and its connection with literary magazines and literary prizes, one immediately notices that this trend has certainly been accepted by the reading public at large. The successful magazine *Granta*, for instance, prides itself on being a magazine which publishes the best international literature in English, irrespective of nationalities. The most prestigious literary prize in the UK, the Man Booker Prize for Fiction, is awarded to writers in English whether they are British citizens or not (“a citizen of the Commonwealth of Nations or the Republic of Ireland”, according to the official announcement).

Writers such as Iris Murdoch, William Golding, Penelope Fitzgerald, Penelope Lively, Anita Brookner, A. S. Byatt, Ian McEwan, etc. have been acknowledged with this prize; but also Salman Rushdie, Nadine Gordimer, Kazuo Ishiguro, Ben Okri, Michael Ondaatje, Roddy Doyle, Margaret Atwood, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, etc. Curiously enough, since its creation in 1969, in its nearly forty-year history, only two writers have been awarded the prize twice: the originally South-African and now Australian

writer J.M. Coetzee, Nobel Prize winner in 2003, and Australian writer Peter Carey.

#### 4.2. Literary histories and anthologies

Similar preoccupations with the definition and scope of English literature are to be found in other recent literary histories and anthologies, even if they fail to widen the spectrum of authors they include, as the new Oxford series (OELH) has done. Andrew Sanders, for instance, published *The Short Oxford History of English Literature* in 1994 (it has since run into several reprints and revised editions) and during its preparation he was, of course, concerned as much with what to include and what not. In a paper he contributed to *The European English Messenger* in 1998 he acknowledged the difficulty of the task and the obstacles he encountered, and offered a relatively conventional justification for his selection, which makes plain his own view of what constitutes “English literature” (Sanders, 1998: 24):

The huge body of work which we can call ‘English Literature’ is selectively read, plundered and hugely admired in a world which stretches well beyond that inhabited by native speakers of English. It also very probably represents the most important cultural achievement of English speakers on the islands of Britain and Ireland. But the huge scope and variety of that achievement is not uniformly accessible either to native speakers in cultures which are not exclusively English, British or Irish or to those beyond these islands who have either acquired a mastery of the English language or who read English literature in translation.

As can be noticed, Sanders claims that English literature is that written by native speakers in Britain and Ireland (so a very traditional and rather colonialist view, in particular with respect to Ireland), but on the other hand he is perfectly aware of the diffusion of that literature abroad, both to native speakers of English living in different cultures and to foreign speakers of the language or simply foreigners who get access to that literature through translation.

I have not mentioned translation before, but certainly one of the new avenues through which English literature is opening up its frontiers is precisely by breaking the boundaries of language. English is the language from which an enormous number of translations are published every year. This means that the widening of English literature in the era of globalisation is

not only a product of the spread of English as a *lingua franca*, but also through its diffusion by means of translations into other languages. So we could say that English literature is not only being written by many native speakers of the language in Britain and in other countries, but it is also read and appreciated by speakers of other languages worldwide who are interested in, or need, or seem pressed by globalisation to read literary works written in English.

Ronald Carter and John McRae have written another literary history: *The Routledge History of Literature in English*, published in 1997 (second printing with added bibliography in 1998). As can be noticed, the terminology has changed from “English literature” to “literature in English”, although the subtitle adds “Britain and Ireland”, in a clear attempt to confine that literature to the British Isles. The reasons they proffer have to do with limited space and their intention to write a literary history from a linguistic point of view, which entails a good deal of exemplification and quotation (Carter & McRae, 1998). Although they do not include authors from outside the Isles, the following words acknowledge the variety and wealth of literature they have left out (Carter & McRae, 1998: 27):

We both work in England and both work widely in Europe, Asia, the USA, South America and in many other regions. English Studies is a vastly different subject in all these areas. The insularity of what English Studies once was is fast disappearing, and this in our view can only be a good thing. We have both learned an immense amount from working with colleagues who teach outside the UK system, and indeed also outside Europe.

Another author who has recently written his own literary history is Michael Alexander: *A History of English Literature* was published in 2000 by Macmillan, and a second edition was issued in 2007 by Palgrave Foundations (Macmillan). He has also provided his explanations about purpose, difficulties, and solutions in a short piece published in *The European English Messenger* in 2000 (Alexander, 2000). He starts his paper by pointing to the double meaning of the term “English literature” and later says (Alexander, 2000: 16) that his original purpose was to “write a *History* of the literature of England, and to some extent of Britain, not of literature in English”.

But then, when he had completed the first version and it was sent by publishers to readers abroad and in Britain, he discovered that “the nation-

al scope worried some of them” (16), to the extent that there was a demand to include other contemporary writers outside Britain. He looked at anthologies and other literary histories in search of support, and noticed the disparity of criteria: Helen Gardner, for instance, included Ezra Pound in her *New Oxford Book of English Verse* (1978). However, Christopher Ricks, who edited the volume in 1999, left Pound out “explicitly on the ground of his nationality” (Alexander, 2000: 17). Alexander also notices that the *Norton Anthology of English Literature* does not include Pound but does include Edna O’Brien, or that Sanders’s *The Short Oxford History of English Literature* “omits Henry James because his adoption of British nationality came at the end of his life, a life largely spent in England” (17).

Apparently pressed by publishers to include non-English authors, particularly in contemporary literature, Alexander opts for a national criterion in his selection, but finds ways to avoid being very restrictive. So, as Ireland became an independent nation in 1922, all Irish authors who wrote in English before that date are eligible as part of “English literature”, and thus Swift, Sterne, Goldsmith, Burke, Edgeworth, Yeats and Joyce are included in his *History*; so too is Samuel Becket, because he was born in 1906, and for that reason was British. Analogously, Seamus Heaney, in spite of his protest for being considered English (“be advised / My passport’s green. / No glass of ours was ever raised / To toast *The Queen*”), is included by Alexander on the ground that he was born in Northern Ireland and was educated in that part of the UK. The same national criterion makes Salman Rushdie eligible, as he has a British passport even if he was born in Bombay.

### 4.3. Selection criteria and labels

Alexander’s case is, I think, clear evidence of the difficulties anthologists and literary historians encounter particularly when dealing with contemporary literature written in English. His piece in *The European English Messenger* triggered off a rejoinder by Theo D’haen (2001) in the following issue. D’haen argued that Alexander’s national criteria for selection were inappropriate because he condemned those he considered lacked quality to the hell of “other literatures”, and accepted as English even those who declared themselves “other” because they were too good to be left out of “English literature”.

He seems to be very much against all labels and categories such as “Commonwealth literature”, “World Literature (Written) in English”,

“Literature in English”, “Literatures in English”, “New Literatures in English” and “literatures in englishes”, classifications that correspond to a diversity of ideological and aesthetic positions. He is rather in favour of inclusiveness, viewing English literature as interconnected with other literatures. He comments on the changes that have taken place in the UK after it joined the European Union, and goes on to say (D’haen, 2001: 61):

As more and more pieces of what we had until then thought of as ‘English’ literature took up residence in other houses, and as these other houses grew larger and were joined by new houses, English literature for some, if not most of us stopped being the only building under the sun. Instead, we started to look upon this building as part of a series of buildings, a terrace, or a town. In other words, we started to relate English literature, and what we saw happening to it –or perhaps rather to our perception of it— to what was going on in and with other literatures. After all, this was also the period of structuralism and post-structuralism, when one looked for relations between things, and not for their essences.

What he means, as a matter of fact, is that we cannot ignore the fact that English literature must include authors such as those who write in English — John M. Coetzee, for instance, who has produced a novel entitled *Foe*, which invites another reading of the canonical *Robinson Crusoe*, or Jean Rhys because her novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* seems indispensable now for any reading and understanding of *Jane Eyre*. D’haen is even more daring and stretches the frontiers of English literature to other European (and non-European) literatures not written in English, and cites Michel Tournier or Maryse Condé, for instance, as both have exerted a similar influence as Coetzee and Rhys upon the same canonical English works.

His arguments in this respect (D’haen, 2001: 63) are closely linked to globalisation and the need to adequately train students in the UK, in Europe and in other parts of the world and prepare them for a world which is no longer confined by national frontiers:

With an eye to not only the economic but also the cultural logic of ongoing European unification and inevitable globalisation determining these students’ future, I think it would be far wiser to insist on the involvement of English literature and culture with the literatures and cultures of modernity at large. This should be all the easier given England’s, and English literature’s, central role

throughout modernity. For English students in the United Kingdom, such a view of English literature might smooth their entry into globalised culture, and ease their integration in the European Union by showing them what unites rather than what separates. For students of English literature in Europe and in the world, it would facilitate access to the subject, while at the same time even strengthening the role of English and of English literature as cultural go-between.

This position is a genuine example of how globalisation can be translated into literary terms. The expansion of the frontiers of English literature means, then, that no national frontiers exist for English literature, as those frontiers do not exist either in globalised trade or the internet, even if the expansion entails the danger of losing the language itself, or at least its dilution among other languages and into translations. There are many advantages as well as disadvantages. Heinz Ickstadt (2000: 21), speaking from the perspective of American Studies, but also fully aware of the transformation that “English” has suffered in the last decades, is another firm and strong voice in favour of this view, which he defines as “intercultural, dialogic, and comparative”:

The comparative as well as the traditionally ‘national’ definition of ‘English’ should both be represented and practised in mutual recognition and awareness. How far it is possible to successfully hold them together in a coordinated plan of studies, I am sure, has been explored in many departments already. That the opening toward the global and post-colonial on the one hand and toward cultural studies on the other will produce gains and losses is obvious. Diversity is no doubt a dubious blessing. What will be lost is the homogeneity of the field, the solidity and coherence of knowledge and competences transmitted. But it is a homogeneity which can be maintained only against the changing realities of the world we live in as well as against our changing conceptions of it. And yet, it seems to me that the losses are richly balanced: not only by a new and rewarding body of literary works and cultural texts but also by an exciting extension of our scholarly curiosity and range of inquiry.

#### **4.5. Globalising the canon**

The new frontiers of English literature are then not exclusively those opened by the new writers of origins other than British who extend the con-

cept of English literature (Rushdie, Kureishi, Gunesequera, Naipaul, Phillips, Okri, Gurnah, etc.), but we should also consider the globalisation to which canonical white and British authors, both contemporary and from other periods, are subjected by cultural studies, translation studies, postcolonial theory, etc.

Not surprisingly, we can talk today of a globalised Shakespeare (Holderness & Loughrey, 2006), a Shakespeare who is not only the English traditional Shakespeare, but also the Shakespeare read, produced, performed and interpreted in many different regions of the world. How many different Othellos, for instance, have been produced by this globalised English literature? Of course the reference to Shakespeare is just one example. Many others could be given: Daniel Defoe, Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens, Joseph Conrad... their canonical works are no longer their own, exclusively English in its narrowest sense. They are now owned by millions of people in the world who have appropriated and rewritten them by means of this new globalised English.

An interesting remark at the end of Simon During's essay "Postcolonialism and Globalisation: A Dialectical Relation after All?" (1998) focuses the issue of the globalisation of literature upon these lines of re-articulation and re-formulation of traditions:

Globalisation represents not so much the end of ethnic and colonialist struggles [...] as a force through which these struggles are continually re-articulated and re-placed, and through which the transitivity of relations like coloniser/colonised, centre/local is continually proved. Which is to say that if the colonial era is going to be remembered in the era of globalisation as always already global, that analytic and commemorative move does not have to be set against the local and indigenous politics of self-determination upon which critical postcolonialisms finally rest (During, 1998: 46).

It is also important, in this respect, to emphasise that globalisation, as Paul Jay has noticed, cannot be taken as synonymous with Westernization or Americanization. That is a widely-spread wrong conception, because globalisation also implies questioning and resistance to the Western system of values, or, in our field, Western literature(s), as well as the stronger presence of the local. No wonder the adjective "glocal" has been coined recently, in the last decade of the twentieth century, to make reference to that new reality. Jay (2001: 39) quotes Arjun Appadurai to the effect that



there is growing evidence that the consumption of the mass media throughout the world often provokes resistance, irony, selectivity, and, in general, *agency* [...] T-shirts, billboards, and graffiti as well as rap music, street dancing, and slum housing all show that the images of the media are quickly moved into local repertoires of irony, anger, humor, and resistance,

and concludes that “the dissemination of Western or American culture provides a context for the exercise of power, for ‘action’ rather than ‘escape’. Some of the writers I have mentioned before, particularly those who belong to different diasporas in the West, are especially endowed to empower their readership with the sort of action advocated by Jay. The importance of local cultures, and their recreation by such diasporic writers, is paramount here, because by this means globalisation also implies the presence of the growing prestige of the colonised.

In short, the process of globalising English literature is not equivalent to Westernization or resistance to it, but should be based, again with Jay’s words,

on the multidirectionality of cultural flows, on the appropriation and transformation of globalized cultural forms wherever they settle in, with close attention to how those forms are reshaped and sent off again to undergo further transformations elsewhere (2001: 42).

Consequently, Jay suggests that we should teach globalised English literature in a new way, stressing the historical, cultural and political background that shapes each work, that which gives it its specific idiosyncrasy.

## 5. Conclusion

This might mean talking about nation-states, of course, but also about postnationality, deterritorialization. In this sense, the subject *English* in our academic curricula will be seen as “a transnational literary institution” (Jay, 2001: 45), and thus our programmes, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels, will have to be “reconfigured to allow for work that stresses how contemporary and earlier writing in English is connected to globalization” (Jay, 2001: 45). Texts like the above-mentioned one edited by Caryl Phillips, *Extravagant Strangers*, are key examples of how to do this, how to incorporate the globalising process to the history of English literature. This way, the

feelings of belonging and identity, which are so essential to many contemporary writers of the diasporas, can be explained and understood within the historical framework that makes them meaningful to contemporary readers and students of literature.

This is a reasonable way, in my view, to respond to the questions posed by Susie O'Brien and Imre Szeman (2001: 605) when they wondered how it would be possible to

think of literature outside the framework of national literatures, and correspondingly, to try to imagine what critical tools might be used to make sense of such literatures, and what in turn might be learned from and about them, in ways that open up new perspectives on the problems and possibilities that we face at the present time.

The answer, although avowedly and very likely not easy to implement, must be provided along those lines, that is lines that will prevent us from falling into the trap of a new Westernization, another homogenization. Let us play multidirectionality, let us appropriate and transform, and in so doing, let us explore, read and study the writers of the different diasporas who write in English across the world, as they are better equipped for the challenge of opening up the new frontiers of globalised English literature.

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*ACROSS THE ISLES*



# PHILIP LARKIN: MODERNIST? ANTI-MODERNIST? POSTMODERNIST?

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**Abstract:** *Ever since his death in 1985, Philip Larkin's lifework has been in the focus of fierce debates. He has been characterized as an anti-modernist (and anti-intellectual) poet, but his texts are also often read in the framework of postmodernism. In my paper I will make an attempt to raise some issues that may clarify Larkin's place in the history of 20<sup>th</sup>-century poetry.*

**Keywords:** *experience, language, modernism, postmodernism, simile.*

## 1. Introduction

Ever since his death in 1985, Philip Larkin's life work has been at the centre of fierce debates. Usually, he is read as a representative of 20<sup>th</sup>-century provincialism or "the English line", but his poetry has also been interpreted in the context of modernism, postmodernism, even post-colonialism. In this paper I will make an attempt to demonstrate that, although Larkin refused to be pigeonholed, his poetry and aesthetic principles can fruitfully be seen in the context of modernism, anti-modernism and post-modernism. Of course, critics have tried to categorize his life works in various ways, but few of them have reckoned with the firm basis of poetic that Larkin elaborated on.

Ian Gregson's summary is a good example of how recent literary criticism has tried to contextualize Larkin within the paradigms of literary history:

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, he evolved a poetic whose first concern was to establish a consensus with his readers based on shared experience — but that this poetic evolved through a dialogue with modernism can be seen clearly in his most important poem, 'The Whitsun Weddings' [...] This amounts to a realist rereading of *The Waste Land's* fertility metaphor (1992: 19).

The famous closure Gregson refers to puts an end to the protagonist's long train journey:

We slowed again,  
And as the tightened brakes took hold, there swelled  
A sense of falling, like an arrow-shower  
Sent out of sight, somewhere becoming rain (1988: 116).

Gregson also suggests that, far from carefully avoiding modernist poetry, Larkin incorporated it "into an English realist world-view", that is, he entered "a conservative dialogue with modernism" (1992: 27). A dialogue suggests a shared experience: that of sharing thoughts. Ideally, it results in a complexity of ideas and feelings constructed on the basis of interacting opposites. For example, in the last lines of "The Whitsun Weddings" he certainly nods to Eliot. In a letter giving instructions to a radio performance Larkin wrote: "Success or failure of the poem depends on whether it gets off the ground on the last two lines" (1992: 301).

## 2. Larkin's similes: readings of modernism?

It will be noticed that Larkin uses a simile, rather than a metaphor, in the closure. Sensing the end of the train journey is "*like* an arrow-shower [...] becoming rain". The dialogue with Eliot's *Waste Land* takes the shape of a simile: a figure of speech that emphasizes the possibility of comparison, but also a lack of identity. This trope is perhaps the most obvious sign of Bakhtinian heteroglossia in Larkin's poetry. To cite two further poems: the persona of "Coming" feels *like* a happy child (without necessarily sharing the child's happiness); the poet implied in "The Trees" hears a faint message "*like* something almost being said" (1988: 166, emphasis added). The anti-modernist and anti-romantic poet keeps up the dialogues with his modernist and romantic predecessors. Similes construct the notion of continuity, but also that of distinct entities.

The same duality can be discerned in Larkin's attitude towards his readers. When he insisted that his poems did not require any scholarly interpretation, and that they should only be read and taken at face value, he was not simply playing the role of the anti-intellectual poet. His goal was to create intimacy between himself and the reader, more precisely, between the implied author (Larkin playing the role of Larkin in the poem) and the implied reader. His goal was to write the kind of poetry that could create a



bridge between author and reader, but he was also aware that it could easily become a barrier between the two sides.

It is well known that Larkin never wrote any systematic theory of poetry; nevertheless, his life work is based on the solid ground of his principles. They are frequently overlooked, either because they appear to be casual remarks or because they contradict each other. The most obvious of these controversies are two statements about personal versus impersonal poetry. In an interview made by Ian Hamilton he said: "I suppose I always try to write the truth and *I wouldn't want to write a poem which suggested that I was different from what I am*" (Larkin, 2001: 23, emphasis added). On the other hand, in a radio interview he pointed out: "What I should like to do is to write *different* kinds of poems, that might be by different people. Someone once said that the great thing is not to be different from other people, but to be different from yourself" (qtd. in Motion, 1982: 74).

When Larkin suggests that he is himself in his poems (as he does in the first interview), he declares his belief in the romantic, autonomous *individual* and paves the way towards confessional lyric poetry, in which the actual poet is the target of representation. But when he claims that he would like to write poems that could be by different people, he speaks about *subjects*. The statement in the second interview suggests that the romantic notion of the individual is an illusion and that the poet's own subjectivity is not autonomous. The latter opinion points toward dramatic monologues rather than personal (let alone confessional) poetry. What is frequently described as Larkin's inner struggle between a romantic writer and a disillusioned Movement poet is actually the conflict between two concepts of the "I": the self as individual and the self as subject. The latter, of course, means that the "I" is "always *subjected* to forces both outside itself, such as social and environmental forces, and within itself, the workings of the unconscious" (Byron, 2003: 45).

What still creates a common denominator for these two concepts (the autonomous individual and the contextualized subject) is Larkin's ambition to preserve experience. This is his often-quoted 1955 statement:

I write poems to preserve things I have seen/thought/felt (if I may so indicate a composite and complex experience) both for myself and for others, though I feel that my prime responsibility is to the experience itself, which I am trying to keep from oblivion for its own sake. Why I should do this I have no idea, but I think the impulse to preserve lies at the bottom of all art (1983: 79).

What Larkin means by experience is undoubtedly “shared experience”, to use Gregson’s phrase. Yet, it becomes “shared” only when the poet creates a text. In an interview, Larkin said: when you write a poem, “you’re trying to preserve something. Not for yourself, but for the people who haven’t seen it or heard it or experienced it” (1983: 52). In other words, shared experience is not the subject matter of his poetry: it is the poem itself. When somebody asked him what exactly it was that he intended to preserve in his poems, he replied: “as I said, the experience. The beauty” (1983: 68). If we interpret “beauty” as ‘the highest aesthetic quality’, we can conclude: enabling the reader to relive the poet’s personal experience is centrally significant in Larkin’s method of composition. Consequently, Wordsworth’s ideal that a poet should be “a man speaking to men” (1923: 937) is very much in the background of Larkin’s credo, for all his anti-romantic tendencies.

### **3. Preserving and rebelling: the Larkin debates**

This duality of preserving the values of poets from earlier ages and rebelling against them is a much-debated dilemma in Larkin criticism. In a stimulating essay, V. Penelope Pelizzon interprets the ambiguity of challenging and preserving as a possible version of Bakhtin’s carnivalesque: “Evaluating Larkin’s work in relation to the carnivalesque demonstrates that his desire simultaneously to challenge *and* preserve social custom is a vital aspect of his complex, regenerative relation to ritual and tradition” (2000: 223). Pelizzon’s suggestion is a fascinating and desperate attempt to read Larkin in the carnivalesque tradition, but it leaves some doubts. Although some of Bakhtin’s terms, such as heteroglossia and polyphony, can easily be applied to Larkin’s life work, carnival in the Bakhtinian sense is not represented, and the carnivalesque is not constructed.

Bakhtin’s category includes not only death, but also rebirth; that is, victory over death. In Larkin, however, death is more often triumphant than not. In his late poem, “Aubade”, he writes: “Death is no different whined at than withstood” (1988: 209); the well-known aphorism of “Dockery and Son” warns us by concluding: “Life is first boredom, then fear” (1988: 153). Laughter, a central element of carnivalesque literature, is not even faintly alluded to. Death can brag in Larkin’s poetry; his protagonists are not mockings (as they would be in a real carnival). One of his innovations is that he

represents life from the perspective of death, without the consolation of afterlife or an alternative life constructed as carnivalesque comedy.

Therefore, Larkin's remark that he is trying to preserve experience "for its own sake" should be taken seriously. He cannot find anything beyond material existence, apart from nothingness, as he suggests in a number of poems (such as "Here", "Nothing to Be Said" and "High Windows"). He may have some half-admitted nostalgia for pure spiritual values, but he is far from the transcendentalism of the French symbolists and T. S. Eliot's modernism.

As a result, Larkin provoked sharp attacks shortly after the publication of his first major volume, *The Less Deceived* (1955), and the anthology entitled *New Lines* (1956). This is what Charles Tomlinson wrote in a famous review in 1957:

My own difficulty with his poetry is that, while I can see Mr. Larkin's achievement is, within its limits, a creditable one, I cannot escape from the feeling of its intense parochialism [...] Further, one can only deplore Mr. Larkin's refusal to note what had been done before 1890 in the ironic self-deprecating vein by Laforgue and Corbière and to take his bearings accordingly. But the modern Englishman is astonishingly provincial and Mr. Larkin (as he tells us) has 'no belief in "tradition": 'I believe,' he writes in *Poets of the 1950s*, 'that every poem must be its own sole freshly-created universe.' And this forty years after 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1957: 214).

Larkin's "Statement" really contains a sentence that is a provocative attack against Eliot:

As a guiding principle I believe that every poem must be its own sole freshly created universe, and therefore have no belief in 'tradition' or a common myth-kitty or casual allusions in poems to other poems or poets, which last I find unpleasantly like the talk of literary understrappers letting you see they know the right people (1983: 79).

I find it important that Larkin uses the word "tradition" within quotation marks. The implication is that it is not tradition itself that he rejects; it would be illogical anyway, since his main ambition is to preserve values. What he rejects is the cult of tradition, the trend called traditionalism, and Eliot's principle of intertextuality. Moreover, I would risk suggesting that he

probably accepted some ideas in Eliot's essay. He could not have found anything unacceptable in this passage:

[Tradition] cannot be inherited. [...] It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year [...]. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity (1963: 22-23).

Tradition is also important for Larkin, and he also views it as a dynamically developing part of the present. His attitude to Eliot's programme of impersonality is much more ambivalent. He rejected the modernist credo that is best summarized in this aphoristic part of the same essay: "What happens is a continual surrender of himself [the poet] as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality" (1963: 25). As pointed out previously, Larkin also said that it was important to be different from oneself in the poem, and his ambition was to write poems that could have been written by different people. Elsewhere, he claimed the opposite: he wanted his readers to believe that the speaker of his poems was really himself. These two remarks indicate the lack of a theoretical framework, but it does not mean that Larkin had no poetic.

Inasmuch as Larkin had no systematic theory, he was definitely the opposite of Eliot, the poet who based his poetry on the firm ground of his theory. Eliot is the prototype of the modern intellectual poet; Larkin is the anti-intellectual poet *par excellence*. Although he never conceptualized this intention, he wanted to reveal his own personality and hide it in the poem simultaneously. This duality included rejecting the dogma of impersonality.

After the neo-modernist evaluation of his poetry by Charles Tomlinson and others, a second wave of attacks took place after Larkin's death. These were mainly generated by the publication of his *Selected Letters* (1992) and Andrew Motion's massive authorized biography (1993). These two books revealed a number of previously unknown details about Larkin's private life and personality. He was accused of misogyny and racism; furthermore, they were associated with his poetic. The problematic points in the biography

became much-debated issues at the level of aesthetic. As Richard Bradford has summarized:

If one wonders how Heaney and Paulin felt licensed virtually to accuse Larkin of Englishness, Morrison offers a kind of theoretical subtext: Anti-modernism is complicit with political conservatism; the use of England as the locative fabric of writing is a version of colonialism; provincialism, and its handmaiden nostalgia, could at stretch be associated with racism (2005: 14-15).

The pros and the cons in the debate about Larkin's supposed racism, misogyny and obscenity are innumerable. Bradford's words are revealing: as opposed to Tomlinson's neo-modernist rejection of Larkin's poetic, which referred to Eliot as unquestionable authority, Tom Paulin and a number of other critics of the nineties attacked what Larkin and Eliot shared.

Is it possible, then, that Gregson's "shared experience" might be a term also applicable to Eliot and Larkin? Instead of entering the fruitless debate about the two poets' political correctness, I wish to point out that they had a subject matter connecting them more strongly than anything else: language. It is well known that Eliot's verse can be read as the poetry of communication: the possibility and impossibility of using language. The opening poem of the Eliot canon, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", is a love song that is never sung. Prufrock cannot communicate, but the poet can, and he does so through the mask of Prufrock. Speaking about the impossibility of speaking is a central paradox in Eliot, which can be observed in a number of his texts, from the early poems to his last achievement, the *Four Quartets*.

Larkin's interest in human signs is no less significant. His two completed novels, *Jill* and *A Girl in Winter*, are about language as a means of construction and of alienation (Bradford, 2005: 75). Larkin was an anti-modernist poet who was fully aware of the post-modern world he was living in. He was conscious that, as a poet, he needed to speak about something that cannot be put into words. He admitted that a vision is more valuable than words ("High Windows"), and suggested that those who know something essential will never talk about it ("Nothing to Be Said"). He knew that language was unreliable, but he played a game pretending that language was to be trusted.

In "Maiden Name" he suggested that the signified and the signifier can swap places, and an important understatement of the poem is that erotic

love is a verbal construct. (Larkin would have been appalled to hear that this is not at all far from Michel Foucault.) In his animal poems (“At Grass”, “The Mower”, etc.) he suggests that communication between humans and animals is impossible, however we pretend that it is not. Likewise, in “The Old Fools” he says: we will find out what is in the minds of old people suffering from dementia when we are old fools ourselves, but then we will not be able to speak about it. One day we will know the answer to the question — but then we will not remember the question itself. The world cannot be described in the reassuring form of catechism: questions and answers do not match.

Larkin’s surprising solution to the problem of alienation and the impossibility of communication is in art. As the quotation from his statement demonstrates, he was against “casual allusions” to works of art in poetry and, indeed, the idea of ekphrasis is very far from his poetic. Or, at least, so it seems. He never made it explicit that a text he wrote was about one particular work of art. He wanted to appear different from the kind of poetry that is about paintings, statues and other artifacts; he definitely intended to deviate from Keats, Yeats, Eliot, the Group poets of the sixties, etc.

Nevertheless, when he condemned the three infamous “P’s”, Pound, Picasso and Charlie Parker in an essay, he revealed that he knew them, and implied that he could have named his heroes in poetry, painting and jazz music. Some of his poems were inspired by documentary films (“At Grass”, “Faith Healing”), actually works of visual art. His major poem, “The Card Players”, is based on the experience of observing Dutch paintings and Cézanne’s picture with the same title. Art was not only important to him, but also an alternative to real life in which we are frustrated by the barrier of language.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This leads us back to the first major volume, *The Less Deceived*, and his statement (both published in 1955). Nicholas Marsh has noticed that in *The Less Deceived* Larkin published some poems in which art appears to be a substitute for sex (“Lines on a Young Lady’s Photograph Album”, “Reasons for Attendance”). Marsh draws the conclusion: Larkin “seeks to preserve something, but in an idealised and dehumanized form” (2007: 146-147). This may form the basis for a Freudian reading of Larkin’s statement:

preserving means substitution. If we put it to the test of the life work, we can find justification both at the beginning and at the end of the career.

In Larkin's first mature poem, "Waiting for Breakfast", he describes how he needs to choose between two women figures: the real partner and the muse of poetry. He chose the muse, and towards the end of his career he concluded: the other option "never worked" for him because of the "arrogant eternity" poetry offered (1988: 215). As he said in an interview: "I didn't choose poetry: poetry chose me" (1983: 62). His subjectivity had to obey the energy arising from the interplay between his unconscious and his superego, which imposed the technique of sublimation on him. It was this choice that inevitably led to the ideal of the autonomous poem, not at all unknown to those French symbolists whose influence Larkin always denied.

Was Philip Larkin a modernist, an anti-modernist, a post-modernist, or something else? He resisted such categories, but was aware of their existence. He created his own laws, and although he did not write any systematic theory, he always stuck to his principles. As an agnostic poet, he knew that he could never find the answers to his most important questions, but his poetry demonstrates that he asked these questions in an extremely thought-provoking way. He pretended to trust what he knew can never be trusted: language. The game he played with this paradox resulted in his fascinating poetry. Studying it is rewarding: it opens up the horizon towards twentieth-century literature — modernist, anti-modernist *and* postmodernist.

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# THE PURSUIT OF POWER: TRANSFORMING BODIES IN LAWRENCE DURRELL'S *THE ALEXANDRIA QUARTET*

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**Abstract:** *The paper focuses on the transformation of the characters' healthy bodies into failing ones. By using Michel Foucault's theory on body as a source of power and knowledge, Alphonso Lingis' theory on body as inscription of libidinal intensity and De Certeau's on the fictionalised body, I shall make an attempt at analysing the transformed bodies of **The Alexandria Quartet**.*

**Keywords:** *blindness, fictionalised body, power, social body.*

## 1. Introduction

Lawrence George Durrell, the well-known British writer born in India, lived almost all his life in countries outside Great Britain. He considered that his spiritual home was in the Mediterranean area. He first lived in Corfu, then in Greece and, during World War II, he fled the country and went to Egypt with his family. In 1942, as a press officer of the British Information Office in Egypt, he was posted to Alexandria (cf. *The Merriam Webster Encyclopaedia*). According to Philip Toynbee,

Mr Durrell has written about a dozen real love stories, entwined them, explored them with a truly Proustian ferocity and set them all against the marvellous background of Alexandria in the late thirties and early forties... The writing is nearly always superb, not only in the great passages of poetical description but also in the asides, the casual wit and brilliance of comment (Durrell, 1968, back cover).

Durrell attracted my attention due to his imaginative and mysterious narratives, which seemed so complex that almost any theme would surface while I researched them. Of his tetralogy, the three postmodern novels, *Justine*, *Balthazar* and *Clea* (but not *Mountolive*) have been written in a style inspired by Albert Einstein's theory of relativity and Werner

Heisenberg's theory of indeterminacy (Brînzeu, 2001: 47). Thus, the world built by Durrell is unstable and dangerous, yet lively and charming, introducing troubled characters who live in the shadow of past events that transformed their bodies.

The theoretical framework that I have used is based on the theories of Michel de Certeau, Michel Foucault and Alphonso Lingis. The three philosophers focus on body matters viewed from various angles: body as text, body in relation with power and knowledge and body influenced by its sexual impulses.

## **2. The main theories applied**

Michel de Certeau developed an interesting theoretical hypothesis regarding the fictionalised body:

Flesh, a raw, formless, bodily materiality, the mythical 'primary material', through corporeal inscriptions (juridical, medical, punitive, disciplinary) is constituted as a distinctive body capable of acting in distinctive ways, performing specific tasks in socially specified ways, marked, branded, by a social seal. Bodies are fictionalised, that is, positioned by various cultural narratives and discourses, which are themselves embodiments of culturally established canons, norms, and representational forms, so that they can be seen as living narratives, narratives not always or even usually transparent to themselves. Bodies become emblems, heralds, badges, theatres, tableaux, of social laws and rights, illustrations and exemplifications of law, informing and rendering pliable flesh into determinate bodies, producing the flesh as a point of departure and a locus of incision, a point of 'reality' or 'nature' understood (fictionally) as prior to, and as the raw material of, social practices (Grosz, 1994: 118).

Thus, in spite of its name, the fictionalised body does not necessarily pertain to a fictional work, but rather represents any body that one may encounter in society. It is an opaque body, constructed with the help of culture, consequently relying mainly on depositing knowledge that can be acquired individually or through the medium of communication. It is thus mainly based on the use of words which are supposed to carry meaning.

Experimental writers such as James Joyce and Samuel Beckett have played with words at the expense of meaning, drawing primarily on the illogical connection theorised by the structuralist linguist Ferdinand de

Saussure between the signifier (i.e. the word proper) and the signified (i.e. the designated object). In this case, the relation signifier-signified should explain the reasons for which sometimes people cannot decipher their own fictionalised body, as de Certeau puts it.

Michel Foucault, the second theorist taken into account, also dealt with body theory, but focused (although not exclusively) on bodily surveillance in his *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison (Discipline and Punish. The Birth of Prison, 1979)*. The French philosopher and sociologist proved that, if kept under constant watch (as they are in the army, correctional or educational institutions and prisons), bodies are able to adjust according to the norms imposed on them. He gave the example of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, a prison design considered quite practical, as it is made up of a circular construction which has a tower in the middle and a series of cells at its periphery. The guards occupy the tower and may consequently watch the prisoners very easily, as they are seen like shadows moving in their small space, unable to communicate with the others, to organise any plot whatsoever in order to escape or to hurt one another in any way. No transmission of knowledge is possible.

A small number of guards are able to keep a close watch on the prisoners and subsequently have them modify their behaviour according to the generally accepted rules and norms of behaviour. The major effect of the Panopticon is that it induces in the prisoner a conscious and permanent state of visibility that guarantees the automatic functioning of power. The writer further suggests that such an institution could also be useful in the case of the sick, the insane or the children as, in each case, there would be no danger of their getting together, hurting each other, becoming contaminated with each other's disease or copying from each other's paper or cheating in examinations (Foucault, 2005: 254-255).

The third theorist mentioned in this paper is Alphonso Lingis, whose theory about bodily inscription is meant to explain the internal energies of the body that become visible on its skin, which is seen as an encrypted surface. Consequently, he views the body as an inscription of libidinal intensities. He mainly discusses the savage body, the tattooed body and the civilised body. For Lingis, the savage body consists of markings and scars that may seem painful and barbaric to Western eyes. The tattooed body, inspired by savages, appears as facile and superficial, sometimes offensive, and its permanence is considered alarming.

What one can notice is a switch of the place where individual identity is located: from the inside, it is moved to the outer surface of the body, on the skin, transforming it into a map, which presents particular regions with overintensified erogeneity. Thus, the body is seen as erotic, having particular parts that are privileged, such as its orifices. As opposed to the tattooed body, Lingis brings the civilised body into question, a body in which the identity appears hidden inside and which is privately marked by ego and consciousness. This body is inscribed, either violently, in institutes of correction, training, prisons, juvenile homes, hospitals, or lightly, through adornment, diet, exercise, etc. (Grosz, 1994: 138-142).

I have used these theories in order to build an analysis of *The Alexandria Quartet* in terms of power, status and money and their relation with the human body. Power, status and money are the three key elements that have always helped set new trends, influencing people's choices, decisions and, ultimately, lives. One no longer needs much discernment once rules are made. Consequently, one can speak of a false freedom of action in terms of what one would like to do. On paper, Lawrence Durrell captures an image of what the wrong use of the three elements mentioned above can lead to. The mosaic background offered by *Alexandria* makes it easy for the writer to develop characters building their lives at the expense of other people and sometimes even of their own. Their bodies are modified in the process and transformed into impaired mechanisms which long for the 'perfection' once possessed. However, it is too late for them to change in any way, as the modifications are serious and often without remedy.

While having a look at the characters' former bodies and comparing them with their new bodies, I shall take into account the already mentioned theoretical perspectives, which may shed some light on the causes, the degree and the seriousness of corporeal change.

### **3. Transformed Bodies**

I shall start with Michel de Certeau's fictionalised body, which is seen as a writing surface on which messages, a text, are inscribed. This body is "as complicated and indeterminate as any literary manuscript. The messages or texts produced by this body writing construct bodies as networks of meaning and social significance, producing them as meaningful and functional 'subjects' within social ensembles" (Grosz, 1994: 117).

In *The Alexandria Quartet*, the living text inscribed on these bodies is harmful and at the same time changing — being subject to various influences, mostly exerted by the people in one's social group and by the situations these create. Most of the times, these are unfavourable influences, which, together with the spell of the race for power cause the degrading transformation of the Egyptians' bodies. It describes a reverse trajectory which leads to their partial or total destruction, whose marks cannot ever be wiped off one's body.

According to Michel Foucault, under such conditions the social body is born, which is “the effect not of a consensus but of the materiality of power operating on the very bodies of individuals” (<http://www.thefoucauldian.co.uk/bodypower.htm>). There is thus a direct relation between the social body and power, which makes it adjust or modify to various degrees. By creating the social body as a concrete form of power, the characters having it reach farther than the well-known aims of status, money and authority, thus reconstructing or reordering the bodies of their subordinates. The quartet characters seem to be capable of going to any lengths in order to attain whichever of the aims mentioned above. There is no limit to the seriousness of the situations they expose their bodies to in order to reach their end, which appears to be justifying any means used and whatever actions they decide to take. As for the respect that is due to one's own person, this is often neglected in exchange for higher goals.

One of the characters in the book, **Leila Hosnani** — mother of two boys, now grown-up men, Nessim and Narouz — as a young woman, neglected her true respectful self, driven by her ambition to achieve higher goals. Leila's former body is dominated by pure interest, which impels her to marry an older man she does not love and later have an affair with David Mountolive without really caring for him either. The latter represented for her the English, a superior race, dominating Egypt and the world. It is Leila herself who, while quoting one of her favourite authors upon the manner in which the English are seen, allows one to catch a glimpse of her own reasons for trying to strengthen her relationship with David Mountolive:

There is a destiny now possible to us — the highest ever set before a nation to be accepted or refused. We are still undegenerate in race; a race mingled of the best northern blood. We are not yet dissolute in temper, but still have the firmness to govern, and the grace to obey. We have been taught a religion of pure mercy which we must now finally betray or learn to defend by fulfilling.

And we are rich in an inheritance of honour, bequeathed to us through a thousand years of noble history, which it should be our daily thirst to increase with splendid avarice, so that Englishmen, if it be a sin to covet honour, should be the most offending souls alive (Durrell, 1968: 411).

Thus, the English are seen as a powerful people, able to maintain their sense of honour and respect at the same time. David Mountolive, as their representative, is manipulated by Leila Hosnani in her attempt at gathering more power, which she can add to that offered by her husband's wealth and which can help her gain a superior social status. It is Mountolive who realises the enormity of what she has been doing and compares her in his imagination to a woman in the street with whom he is arranging a transaction. He is bewildered by the reasons underlying her actions, as he listens to her voice with astonishment, pity and shame.

It was clear that what she saw in him was something like a prototype of a nation which existed now only in her imagination. She was kissing and cherishing a painted image of England. It was for him the oddest experience in the world. He felt the tears come into his eyes as she continued the magnificent peroration, suiting her clear voice to the melody of the prose (Durrell, 1968: 412).

For her false behaviour, ruled by ambitions of power, influence and money, Leila is symbolically punished by Durrell, who destroys the face of the character by inflicting on it a terrible disease. Her being is thus partially destroyed, from a physical perspective, the most important part of her exterior appearance is ruined and she can no longer use it to achieve her obscure ends. Her new body is thus characterised by a serious flaw which can be read as a mark of her devious past actions that profoundly affected the people around her. Judged in the light of Lingis' theory (Grosz, 1994: 141), her body is consequently marked by her ego, which becomes overdimensional in her attempt to take more power and strengthen her status. Leila's consciousness is, however, not disclosed to the reader too much, the writer leaving it for him/ her to understand the character's ulterior motives and to judge her overall balance.

Leila's son, **Nessim** Hosnani, a well-known banker of the city, also suffers physically and is symbolically punished for his misdeeds. It is supposed that Nessim and Justine got married to set up a plot against the British, thus

uniting two nations: the Copts, whose representative is Nessim, and the Jews, whose representative is Justine. The **Copts** seem to have been wronged by the British in the past and now wish to retaliate by smuggling guns into the country. The Copts are, according to Leila's husband, "genus Pharaonicus — the true descendants of the ancients, the true marrow of Egypt. [...] all through we have been the brains of Egypt [...]. Despite persecutions we have held an honoured place here; our Christianity has always been respected" (Durrell, 1968: 421-422).

In this case, one deals with a collective body discriminated against by the attitude of the British, who appear to have believed that the Copts posed a threat to the officials of the empire. Consequently, the British decided to remove them from positions of power. This impedes the natural evolution of their bodies, as their ability to lead remains unexplored. Leila underlines that, despite this unfair treatment, for her family, "there was no real war between Cross and Crescent" (Durrell, 1968: 425).

Nevertheless, it is one of her sons, Nessim, and his wife who wish to even the scores with the British and their unfair past actions. While organising their plot and gathering information to support it, Nessim almost loses his wife — which would have seriously affected his body and transformed it for good — because he sends her into the arms of British Intelligence agents, such as Darley and Pursewarden, in order to extract information from them. As he wants to prevent Darley from forming too strong an attachment to Justine, knowing that Darley is deeply in love with her, Nessim lets him understand that he is being watched or supervised all the time.

According to Michel Foucault's theory on bodily surveillance, one is supposed to act properly, be truthful, strive for moral behaviour, etc., as a result of this form of manipulation (Foucault, 2005: 245-255). This is the case of Darley, who is thus forced to focus more on the best way in which he can treat Justine and also keep their affair hidden from her husband and his friends and employees, and less on the service of confidentiality to his Intelligence department. This results in the creation of his stressed-out body.

The stressed-out body is the body that is affected by the miseries around or within oneself, that annihilates such miseries mostly unconsciously, without giving them a leading role in one's life and without allowing them to leave any mark after the process of annihilation has finished

(Pârlog, 2006: 102). This body type is thus always written on the inside and sometimes temporarily on the outside too. Darley has to leave Egypt in order to regain his balance and be able to rebuild his life after the tempestuous relation with Justine and the sad and pitiful affair she had with Melissa, the Greek cabaret dancer. He is not punished in any way by the writer, unlike Justine, Leila or Nessim.

However, Darley is considered to be metaphorically unable to see, as he wears spectacles. Critic J. A. Weigel is of the opinion that he is also “partially blind psychologically” (Weigel, 1965: 105). Thus he is inscribed both externally and internally, according to de Certeau’s theoretical view. He cannot trust his own psychological mechanism, which is supposed to make him a self-assured individual, and which would help him gain a realistic perspective upon the events around him. Nevertheless, the reader cannot have any confidence in his stories, as his point of view appears to be wide off the mark. He is a shallow character and narrator, which is also suggestive of his dreamy perspective.

But he is not the only blind person in the quartet. The reader may encounter several types of blindness in the book — *proper* or *metaphorical blindness* — as the writer wishes to prove that his characters deteriorate, become degraded, having passed through terrible life experiences, or become anchored in stressful situations in their search for power, situations which, in most cases, have negative effects upon their bodies. As Weigel emphasises, there is “stark blindness” (Weigel, 1965: 105) in the case of Pursewarden’s sister Liza and “partial blindness, half-vision, and distorted vision for others” (Weigel, 1965: 105). Among the other protagonists, one can point out Nessim, who becomes half-blinded towards the end of the story, and also Justine, whose eye droops after a stroke.

They can all be considered blind during the carnival, because they use masks, which cover their faces and thus cause their inability to recognise the others, whether friends or mere acquaintances. Weigel points out that “blindness bestows freedom of action on those the blind cannot see” (<http://www.thefoucauldian.co.uk/bodypower.htm>). This gives them power over the others, as, under the shelter of a different identity, they enjoy more freedom. That also makes it possible for them to do virtually anything. They may borrow distinct identities and pose as someone else and not really feel responsible for their actions.



Masks and blindness blend in Nessim's case, as he hides all the time and is not truly honest with the people around him. He is given a new body by Durrell, as a result of his exaggerate ambitions. The character becomes physically impaired — he loses an eye, as mentioned above. He also loses his status, as he becomes a driver on an ambulance, once the British, under Mountolive's guidance — now ambassador posted to Alexandria — discover his surreptitious plot. Nessim's new bodily transformation might also be a metaphor for his mental blindness (Weigel, 1965: 105), his inability to really understand the world and grasp its significance.

Subsequently, he should content himself with one eye, but he should also use it extremely carefully, so as to be able to prevent the reiteration of his past mistakes. His temporarily consumed body (i.e. the body which can recover after a harsh period of physical and mental struggle that leaves its visible mark upon the subject (Pârlog, 2006: 102)) will recover towards the end of the quartet, where, together with his wife, he will try to regain their lost power and status.

G. S. Fraser considers that "power is only a duty for Nessim" (Fraser, 1968: 156), neglecting to take into account the actions that the banker is capable of taking in order to gain more of it, but still acknowledging that it is also a "burden" for him and a responsibility that he has inherited (Fraser, 1968: 157). Moreover, he believes that, as with Mountolive, Nessim has been trained to use power, not for his own sake, but within the context of public service and family tradition (Fraser, 1968: 155). Whereas for his wife, Justine, power is "a sort of passion" (Grosz, 1994: 118) — she acquires more power for its own sake. She represents a strange and rather unstable character from a psychological point of view.

In the end, Justine, the embodiment of every man's fantasy, fares no better than her husband. She has cheated on Nessim endlessly without needing an 'official' reason, which is her attempt at transforming her body so that she may live with a painful memory — that of having been raped as a child. She has a very odd psychology and she is very indifferent about what she does to either her body or her mind. Justine's body resembles the body described by Lingis "as a surface of libidinal and erotogenic intensity, a product of and material to be further inscribed and re-inscribed by social norms, practices and values" (Grosz, 1994: 138). Her body is over-inscribed by various erotic writings which somehow add pressure to the stress caused by her organising the plot against the British.

Justine is unable to maintain a balance between her body and her mind. She cannot put up with the loss of her former status, after the plot has been exposed and, consequently, she becomes deranged — the manner under which another form of her body manifests itself. Her direct interactions with power, influence, and money have a devastating effect upon her person. However, in contrast with the other characters, Durrell seems to favour her. She regains her balance and sanity and, still being dominated by ambition, she starts rebuilding the influence her family had before the discovery of the plot. Thus, her stressed-out body (Pârlog, 2006: 102) recovers after a period spent outside the country.

Another character that suffers for not having tried hard enough to achieve her goal is Clea. She is a painter, rather fond of older men, a person who finds it easy to make friends and is described as calm, moderate and reflexive. She is also one of the few characters in the book who disregard power and money. She is the one who, in the end, becomes Darley's lover and best friend. It is only she who manages to embody the perfect lover. Clea's body suffers a major modification as a result of an accident, during which she has her hand harpooned by mistake. This change that affects her body represents a terrible loss for her and is interpreted, in the book, as a punishment for the bad paintings she did, for their poor quality and for her not having striven to create better art. Clea's maimed body is just another way in which the writer suggests the existence of destiny and of bad luck striking dilettantes when they least expect it.

Clea is much more of a puzzle. She is from the beginning at what might be called a sympathetic distance from life. Horrified by unexpected, unwanted adoration, like Narouz's, she can nevertheless calmly make pictures of the injured parts of venereal patients for Balthazar, without being overcome by pity or horror. [...] her calm gift has to be outraged by pain, terror, near-death, mutilation, in the harpoon incident, before it can break through into proper art. But one notices that even after this very bad shock her *persona* seems to reassemble very rapidly; so also does Darley's (Fraser, 1968: 151).

Durrell seems to have made a habit of punishing his characters for their bad behaviour, whether immoral or non-liberating. Emphasising each human being's need to follow his/ her aims according to the rules of an almost perfect being who is supposed to be straightforward, honest, courageous, the writer finds an array of means by which to point out that partic-

ular characters have wronged themselves or other people. Nevertheless, he also gives an example of what may happen to a man who is always concerned with rightfulness, helpfulness and philosophy.

This over-analytical streak brings one to one's death, as is the case of Pursewarden, who is caught in between two powerful and influential friends — Nessim, the founder of the Judeo-Coptic plot, and Mountolive, the British ambassador striving to find the culprits. Pursewarden's difficult position makes him contemplate suicide, therefore the complete destruction of his body, as he finds no way of sparing either of his friends. He knows Nessim's secret and he feels compelled to divulge it to Mountolive, who is in need of help to finish the serious investigation of the conspiracy.

In Pursewarden's case, there is no need for an external eye to watch him, as Foucault suggested, to make him behave in the right manner. His own inner eye compels him to be truthful to both his friends. Nevertheless, his sensitive, meditative character makes him self-annihilate and thus suspend any future actions of his body. However, Pursewarden's situation is singular. Balthazar, the homosexual doctor in the novel, tries to commit suicide because of irrational reasons — having been rejected by a lover. Balthazar's situation is rather common and his body recovers with the help of the friends who support him and help him through this rough period of his life. Thus, Durrell's characters sometimes decide to give up their bodies — transformed for the worse — in exchange for eternal peace.

However, some of his characters, although not wishing to die, have to face their end because of illnesses, accidents or old age. Such is the case of Cohen, Melissa, Leila, Fosca, Scobie. Others simply become victims of the power games played by the great manipulators of the book — the couple Nessim and Justine. Besides Pursewarden, who destroys his body because of ethical reasons, Narouz, Nessim's brother, runs the risk of having his body destroyed in a plot devised by Nessim himself, as Narouz had become rather fanatical while preaching at the Cabbala meetings and was jeopardising the conspiracy against the British. The lust for power, in this case, would have forced Nessim to dispose of his brother's body without second thoughts. However, in the end he is not the one that kills his brother, but Memlek (called by Fraser "the nadir of power" (Fraser, 1968: 155)) who was also interested in keeping him quiet and the conspiracy hidden.

There is one more body that the Egyptian plotters apparently want to dispose of and that is Capodistria's. He is the one who transformed Justine's

body while she was a child and affected her psychologically for the rest of her life by raping her. Now he is one of her husband's friends and part of the scheme against the British. Capodistria has his body seemingly destroyed during the duck-shooting party organised by Nessim, so that he may be offered an official reason for leaving the country and not be found as part of the plot and investigated by the police. He is changed internally as his body apparently no longer functions and he is given a new identity on leaving the country. Foucault's theory may be applied to this case, as he states that bodies can be transformed easily by different forms of power which change it on the inside (Foucault, 1979: 22).

#### 4. Conclusion

To conclude, power has always exercised an attraction upon human beings, who mostly suffer because of the high pressure they are exposed to. Although satisfied for a while, Durrell's characters start showing the physical marks which the battle with power left them with. Some even give up their bodies altogether, as they have become the victims of those yearning for wealth, status and influence. They live in a sad world of people dominated by ambition, exaltation and cruelty.

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# DAVID LODGE: MEDIA(TED) WRITING GAMES AND THE ART OF FICTION

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**Abstract:** *The writing game is central to Lodge's sense of responsibility as a novelist and of his interests as a critic. It is by the means of the media that lodgian narratives gradually shape themselves into fabricated messages, unadulterated acts of media(ted) communication where textual poetics gradually gives way to textual politics.*

**Keywords:** *media(ted) communication, textual politics, writing game.*

## 1. Introduction: Last Things First ...

The original aim of the present paper was to focus primarily on David Lodge's *The Art of Fiction*, the title of which, according to Lodge himself, had encroached on the title of the magisterial essay by Henry James. However, as Lodge takes *the art of fiction* very seriously and often writes intertextually and allusively, willing to challenge his readers as well as entertain them, expanding the theoretical framework of the paper seemed more inspired. What interests more is not *The Art of Fiction* alone, but rather David Lodge's *art of fiction* as a *writing game* mediating a *textual poetics* into a *s/textual politics*. The *writing game* plays a strategic role in the *art of fiction* of the lodgian text investigated from under a *differing* and *different* perspective: that of the rewritten and rewriting *cultextual other* which is *the text*. Humanity and the novel have long been considered to be in close connection, as both are culturally communicative, mediated/mediating and fabricated *s/textual* writing games.

## 2. Gaming the Text

David Lodge's work rounds itself up as an allegory of the world we live in, where the *text* depicts, inscribes and allows the reading of that which

one would prefer to keep silent about. In view of that, David Lodge focuses on the central idea of *truth* and has it deconstructed. Thus, while older texts sought to have reality embedded into fiction, the newer practices adopt the opposite/opposing position: that of considering the amount of fiction(alizing) that lies at the core of the real. With Lodge, realism remains a focal factor, but the real in his work is parodically presented as being nothing but a *text*, whose materiality invades our daily lives.

Literature has grown to be another manifestation of the *world as stage*, *the world as (pre)text*, of that which is now acknowledged as the *textuality* of the contingent, whose *texting* (reading, rereading and misreading) is a universe, a practice, a globalizing factor therefore. A writer equally preoccupied with the writing of fiction and with the writing about fiction, David Lodge's art of fiction(alizing) might be said to belong to a particular kind. His works are manufactured at the frontier between literature and criticism or theory, as one type of writing has the other *infected* with its own, particular structuring *deviant* (de)vices and practices.

Hence, one has to unavoidably look into Lodge's theoretical articles to discover outspoken formulations of his credo/ideology, otherwise simply and obliquely alluded to in his fiction. All of Lodge's works unfold a poetics of plurality and fragmentation, to which one of globalizing non-representation is added, as the writer assumes postmodernism only to be ironical about it. Lodge's writing articulates a fundamental modernist principle in resisting any separation between form and content, even though, in his structuralist phase, Lodge sometimes seemed to have given some priority to form, which, in general, he has refused to separate from content. (Consider, for example, *Therapy*, Lodge's first novel since *Ginger, You're Barmy*, to be told entirely in the first person, though with a significant difference.

Although *Therapy* functions like a monologue — which might seem to go against Lodge's regard for Bakhtin and the dialogic principle —, Tubby's utterance, assertive but insecure, pleading or argumentative, is always aware of other voices that have to be answered or placated. Moreover, at the heart of the book is a writing tour de force in which the monologue becomes ventriloquial or heteroglossic. The earlier novel was supposed to be a written narrative, as were the extracts from Bernard Walsh's journal in *Paradise Lost*, but Tubby's narrative is a spoken utterance: colloquial, slangy, sometimes obscene registering every shift of mood from exasperation to exaltation. Lodge himself has commented, "First person narration appeals to con-

temporary novelists because it permits the writer to remain within the conventions of realism without claiming the kind of authority which belongs to the authorial narrative method of the classic realist novel" (1992: 209)).

To that end, *The Novelist at the Crossroads*, *Working with Structuralism* and *The Practice of Writing* have been re-read to identify the writing games at the level of the fictional metatext which eventually make up Lodge's *art of fiction*. According to Lodge (1996: 18), the novel is a form of communication, composition and reception. Thus, Lodge's double *writing game* manifests itself into his *writing of culture(s)* and his *writing of otherness* (the other = the text). From structure to content and back, the lodgian *writing game* leads along the lines imposed by the modern condition and breaks all ties with traditional modes of writing while simultaneously using them as pieces of the broader puzzle assumed.

### 3. Texting the Game

The lodgian writing game leads to text-intern, intertextual, in-textual encounters which entail inter-gamed/ing, *differing* and *different* identity constructs. The outlines of a *writing game theory* are hard to establish due to the fact that, to Lodge, the art of gaming the written text is a continuous mutation of a centralized structure controlled from a center that opens, but also delimits, a space of texts.

The concept of centered structure is in fact the concept of a free play based on a fundamental ground, a free play which is constituted upon a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which is itself beyond the reach of the free play. With this certitude, anxiety can be mastered, for 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 (Derrida, 1989: 231).

David Lodge de-centers the centered concept of structure. Consequently, the center is only a function, a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions come into play. The moment when language invades the universal problematic is the moment when everything becomes discourse, i.e. everything becomes a system where "the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the interplay of signification ad infinitum" (1989: 232).

David Lodge's thinking is a de-centered activity, which articulates itself in unique *writing games*. The space is opened by this game wherein the *writing game* develops and performs on the scene/stage of writing, both his *écriture* and its writingness. The name of the game plays an important strategic role because the game of writing is not the search for meaning, but rather a special kind of text-interpretation and text-writing that leads to a text-intern cultural othering. Lodge's deconstructive writing/reading is a prudent, differentiated (both different and differing), slow, stratified writing that involves a new attitude toward the text, which makes an approach to the textual dimensions possible. In the end, the text is free from the trap of interpretative harassment and will be restored to itself.

The role of the game is to achieve some sort of *différence/différance*, *reserve* and *réstance* or *dissemination*, so that the writing game becomes a part of the deconstructive activity, no less a puzzle than the others. Lodge's *other kind of writing* is the non-linear, double writing of lodgian deconstruction that belongs both to a general *meta-level* of interpretability and to the s/textuality of the lodgian text. The latter can be seen as a form of intercourse where the reader and the text come together, devoid of all culturally construed inhibitions. The less one knows about the other engaged in this *intercourse*, the greater the pleasure. "(Leo) But it's just about the most intimate thing you can do with another person, isn't it? Taking off your clothes, lying down together, flesh to flesh. It must be extraordinary doing it with a total stranger, off the street'" (Lodge, 1991: 61).

Lodge adopts Bakhtin's theory on heteroglossia to negotiate diverse or opposing beliefs and attitudes as a way of coming to terms with the contemporary realities of *the writing game* of *writing cultures*. As a dialogic negotiator, Lodge often feels ambivalent about the issues he examines and his fiction/writing does not presume to offer solutions to the socio-cultural problems under consideration, but rather suggests negotiations as an appropriate way of dealing with the complexities of the contemporary literary *written* and *writing* life.

#### 4. The Art(fulness) of Fiction

The great manipulative power of his fictional text and textual game is viewed as postmodern construe against a social co(n)text able to generate differing cultextual others. Lodge's text literally serves the intellectual *other-*



*ing* cotext and context of his *writing game* as a forceful vehicle that voices concerns and anxieties about issues that are significant to him as a critic, a playwright, and stage director. The creative representation of the fictional-textual images that are mentally and visually experimented engages us in a cultextual process of othering while rewriting projections that voice and reflect back the contemporary social reality.

Regardless of the plentiful endeavors made at finding a common linguistic code, language seems to have lost its attribute as *the* perfect means of communication and gradually turned into a barrier, an obstacle, so that, paradoxically enough, specialized discourses, metalanguages simply get in the way, hindering the communication facilitated by linguistic convention. The tremendous communicative power of Lodge's language games and the intended politics of the text that unfolds (simulates itself?!) before our eyes just like a rolling film, are combined with *self-reference* (the text keeps referring back to itself), irony and simulation.

(Leo) The dreadful thinness of contemporary British writing. It's lib, lazy, self-satisfied prattle. [...] he (Simon) luxuriates in his own obnoxiousness. He has orgasms of self-loathing. Don't let the metafictional tricks fool you. The piece is nothing but bad faith jerking itself off. [...]

(Maude) What does 'metafictional' mean?

(Simon) It's a bit of American jargon, Maude. Remember, Leo works in a university English department. He can't open his mouth to breathe without inhaling a lungful of words like metafiction, intertextuality, and deconstruction. They dance like dust motes in the air of American classrooms. [...]

(Leo) It means fiction which draws attention to its own status of a text (88).

The lodgian text converges towards a clear-cut *authorially intended* message, "although you cannot absolutely know or control the meanings that your novel communicates to your readers, you cannot *not* know that you are involved in an activity of communication, otherwise you have no criteria of relevance, logic, cohesion, success and failure, in the composition of your fictional discourse" (Lodge, 1996: 196). What is the reader left with in the end? The three basic levels the novel contains: the personal, the social and the literary. They all unfold in the same direction, although their juxtaposition and, at times, conflicting interaction divert the reader's attention to the technicalities of novel writing, structure and texture of the text, i.e. *the art of fiction*.

Since novels “are such vast and complicated structures, and our experience of them is so extended in time, that it is impossible for the human mind to conceive of a novel without blurring or forgetting the parts through the accumulation of which this totality has been Conveyed” (Lodge, 1976: 83), we find ourselves wondering how to evaluate the media(ted) communication in the postmodern world of reversed/reversing values and of a plurality of cultural codes, wherein the written fictionalized text is seen as one such communicative instantiation. The problem with the plurality of cultural codes is that it often seems to lead to a related point of view — namely relativism — that anything goes, that nothing is truer, ‘more right’ or ‘more wrong’ than anything else.

## 5. Conclusion: Last Things First ...

The medium of the lodgian *writing game* is almost exclusively language. There are certain features of the text that are not related to writing but rather to the gaming of the *script*, which undoubtedly has an influence on the voyeur reader. This last feature is very important for the *marketing* of the text. However, this does not affect the way in which the fiction hidden beneath the *covers* of the stage is perceived, this being a matter of aspect versus content (i.e. fiction itself).

(Maude) What's wrong with that? If they get some satisfaction out of expressing themselves in words ...

(Leo) Writing is not just self-expression. It's communication (Lodge, 1991: 35).

David Lodge attempts to create a new role for his writing, one that moves beyond the strictures of realism, incorporating irony, pop culture and formula variety in an attempt to more effectually present the world as something worth considering. There is an ever increasing sense that the image-conscious culture with which his characters communicate has little inclination to receive the serious literary work. Predominance of mass-media(ted) forms of communication within the lodgian *writing game* manifests itself in two directions: one is the easy euphoria of the broadcast (*reproduced and projected*) textual image, simplified and created specifically to propagate itself. The other is the established aesthetic of the inter/intratextual passive viewer (and/or voyeur), glorifying not merely the images that the play/script

presents, but also the reception of the messages therein, enabling the redefining of a *lodgian gamed art of fiction*.

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# THE NAME OF THE GAME IS SHAKESPEARE

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**Abstract:** *The paper looks at the teenager spin-off subgenre of film adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, with an emphasis on O and She's the Man, all set in the context of American youth culture. Starting from more general notions related to the process of Shakespearean appropriation, we will pay special attention to the two directors' choice of sports related themes, justified by the importance of sports in every-day life and in the school curriculum, and capitalizing on typically American values, such as competitiveness, team spirit, equality of opportunity, and fair play.*

**Keywords:** *discrimination, education, film adaptations, team spirit.*

## 1. Introduction

Authorship comes into existence when writing becomes subject to cultural surveillance and censorship, in other words, when discourse becomes quantifiable, transferable. When the written text is transgressed, in an act of communion, subjection or contestation, the phenomenon turns into something that — in Shakespearean scholarship — has come to be known as appropriation. The notion of literary influence has often been approached in dialectic terms, as a conflict, a competition, a matter of assumed superiority or inferiority. This is what Harold Bloom (1997) calls, in the title of a highly influential volume of literary theory, “the anxiety of influence”, the act of writing “against” a predecessor.

According to Bloom, appropriation means two different things for the talented and for the less talented poets: weak writers tend to idolize, while strong authors contest. Consequently, the act of appropriation may be a form of gaining cultural capital and prestige or a way of subverting a canonical text, of responding to it. Secondly, appropriation can work as a process of identification, a locus where the relationship between the Self and the Other is worked out, therefore an identification “of” or an identification “with” (Desmet and Sawyer eds., 1999: 8).

In the former case, the appropriating effort seeks integration in a broader set of unified, generally accepted values. In the latter, the intensity of the personal approach transforms the act of appropriation into a battlefield where subcultural, marginal, “under-”studied ideologies compete for more visibility. Thirdly, appropriation may be viewed in a dialogic manner, with a term borrowed from Bakhtin’s “dialogism” (Desmet and Sawyer, 1999: 9), with literary texts being made up of multiple, often competing voices, engaged in a dynamic dialogue, in a responsive and creative relationship.

The tradition of Shakespeare’s appropriation has manifested an interest in all these stances. Contemporary pop romance (in fiction, music, or film) may be argued to appropriate Shakespearean themes or characters in an attempt to regain some of the intellectual prestige the genre has long lost. Conversely, contemporary drama or art cinema stemming from a Shakespearean plot aims at achieving a postmodernist experiment, of intertextuality or pastiche (an example could be Tom Stoppard’s plays, loosely based on the literary canon). The process of appropriation as inclusive identification is present in the attempt of numerous nations other than the British to claim Shakespeare as “their own”, as a national icon.

Perhaps the most illustrative case is that of Germany, which, following Goethe’s romantic recipe, transformed the Swan of Avon into a true Genius of the North, worshipped at Weimar just like the German national poet and revisited ideologically in moments of national crisis. The act of exclusive identification would include what Jan Kott (1967) defined as the “contemporary” nature of the Shakespearean text, a process of political or cultural commitment: as an illustration, during the Cold War period, Shakespeare’s plays have often been used as comments against the oppressive political regimes in Eastern Europe. Finally, the appropriation of the Bard’s work by marginal ideologies has become a flourishing branch of postmodernist Shakespearean scholarship: postcolonialism or feminism are only two examples of how the Elizabethan discourse can be revised.

Another approach to the phenomenon of the English playwright’s appropriation is suggested by Michael Bristol’s notion of “big-time Shakespeare” (2007). According to the critic, appropriation means the institutionalization of the Bard, a process that has probably been initiated by David Garrick in 1769, when the famous actor organized the Shakespeare Jubilee at Stratford, composing odes and hymns to the memory of an author

who had been — otherwise — long forgotten, organizing public processions and allegorical parades with Shakespearean themes and characters, etc. (Dobson, 1994). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Shakespeare has been used to serve corporate goals, power structures and more or less conservative cultural ideologies: he has been appropriated by large corporations and influential industries, such as Disney or Hollywood, as a vehicle for the acquisition of capital, fame and power. In the global era, the result was that Shakespeare's appropriation became a world phenomenon of unprecedented dynamism.

As a response to “big-time Shakespeare”, Desmet and Sawyer offer the “small-time Shakespeare” (1999: 2), a form of appropriation which emerges from local or individual responses to the Bard's work, depending on the literary, social, or cultural climate of a given time and place. This would be the case of performances or film adaptations of Shakespeare's works, which do not only reformulate the psychology of the play, but also reconsider the producers' or the directors' relationship and response to Shakespeare and to one another. Such is the case of two filmed versions of *Hamlet* — Laurence Olivier's (1948) and Kenneth Branagh's (1996) — which are intimately bound to each other, the latter being an extensive attempt to criticize the psychoanalytical interpretation of the former.

“Big-time” and “small-time” Shakespeare cannot, however, be easily separated from each other, being both creative and critical practices and aiming both at answering a question that has been asked by Shakespearean scholarship for almost half a century: how does Shakespeare's cultural capital inform the desire to adapt the 17<sup>th</sup> century text to the tastes and expectations of 20<sup>th</sup> century mass culture?

## 2. Shakespeare and Sports Films

Shakespeare's place at the very heart of popular culture is not, however, only a 20<sup>th</sup> century experiment. If we were to place the 17<sup>th</sup> century Englishman in one socio-cultural location, this would not be among the elite: he was not of gentle birth, he did not attend university, he did not have an elitist profession, he offered his audiences works derived from folk practices that were immediate, oral, visual, gestural. Both as performance scripts and as dramatic fictions, the Bard's plays are infused with signs of popular culture. Therefore, adapting him for the screen, one of the most remarkable pop enterprises of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, has not necessarily

been a new-fangled development. The Hollywood spin-offs, a genre that became popular in the 1990s, are a tangible proof of Shakespeare's keen nose for juicy plotlines and democratic approach to culture.

The spin-offs revolving around the motif of sports and athletic competitions seem to dominate this rather new genre, a proof of the importance of sports in the every-day lives of the contemporary general public, sports having a much greater impact on the masses than any other form of pop art, including music and the cinema industry (Jackson, 2000). Although the word "sport" itself appears quite often in the Shakespearean text, the Elizabethan playwright never employed it in the sense of "an activity involving physical exertion and skill", a meaning that had been in use from early in the sixteenth century (OED). Instead, he uses sport to describe, among others, a diversion, pastime, amusement or pleasure as in Richard III's opening soliloquy ("I am not made for sportive tricks", I, i), or a martial manifestation as in *Henry V* ("His companies unletter'd, rude and shallow, /His hours fill'd up with riots, banquets, sports, /And never noted in him any study, /Car! /Game on!" I.i).

It is, then, perhaps appropriate that a number of contemporary playwrights and film directors have used sports (activities involving physical exertion and skill), to frame their theatrical adaptations. On the stage, the motif of sports has been used on several occasions in the 1990s and 2000s (Lester, 2008). In 1998, Richard Rose directed a production of *Two Gentlemen of Verona* at the Stratford Festival using costumes inspired by a 1917 photo of the Upper Canada College hockey team. Another example would be Chris Cocoluzzi and Matt Toner, who planned to adapt Shakespeare's 37 plays into five sports-based adaptations. In 2001, they presented *1Henry VI*, *2Henry VI*, *3Henry VI* and *Richard III* — the Wars of the Roses tetralogy — as a single rugby match in *Shakespeare's Rugby Wars*.

In 2002, they condensed *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello* into brief soccer matches in *Shakespeare's World Cup*. In 2003, Shakespeare's Roman-themed plays became *Shakespeare's Gladiator Games*. In 2004, Cocoluzzi and Toner plan to present *Shakespeare's Comic Olympics*, followed in 2005 by *Shakespeare's NHL* (National History League), another hockey adaptation (Lester, 2008). Considering how prominent sports are in North American educational institutions, advertising, and popular culture, it is not surprising that modern adaptations have found expression through sports. Perhaps the most illustrative case is the immense success enjoyed



by Wayne and Shuster's *The Shakespearean Baseball Game* production, first presented in 1958 on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, which was to become their most popular sketch in North America.

The two films to be analyzed in this paper are teenager spin-offs, which adapt Shakespeare's plays *Othello* and *Twelfth Night* to current pop culture, making the Bard still appealing to the young generation of today. The conflicts of *O* (2001, directed by Tim Blake Nelson) and *She's the Man* (2006, directed by Andy Fickman) are presented under the guise of sports competitions in the world of soccer/ football and basketball respectively, with the basketball court and the football pitch becoming new battlefields, where contemporary adolescents have to prove their social and survival skills.

Being considered two of the sports that lie at the core of the American culture and lifestyle, both basketball and football have been included in school curricula as a "social device for steering the young into the mainstream of American life by teaching 'appropriate' attitudes, values, norms and behaviour patterns" (Thompson, 1978: 84). Such "appropriate" attitudes and values have been identified by sports theoreticians (Josephson, 2008) to be trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness and standing for a positive role model, which together represent the true spirit of 'sportsmanship' that will be further developed in the adolescents' later life.

Discussing American films about sports, Pearson (et alii, 2003: 146) points out that "American films portray the United States as it wanted to see itself", at the same time being the purveyors of values, mores and customs in the American society. Consequently, Hollywood films dealing with sports focus on the success ideology and in particular on the concept of the hero, as spokesperson of the aspirations of his culture and the basic values of his society (Thompson, 1978: 81-82). This implies assessing the hero's archetypal qualities — fairness, prowess, success — in the context of the sports court and PE training. One of the messages that both *O* and *She's the Man* convey is that achievements are attained through physical activities, and that a talented youth can make it in life through hard work and a sound appropriation of work ethics — one of the core values of capitalist societies, the American one in particular — criteria which are all the more quantifiable in the down-to-earth, palpable field of sports.

As the title suggests, *She's the Man* looks at the much-discussed issue of 'girl power', being centered on gender stereotypes and on the socially-

constructed ideals of masculinity and femininity, setting to prove a hypothesis that has been constantly denied by mainstream patriarchal thinking, who considered it disquieting and subversive — i.e. that women are actually able to compete against men as their equals. The film opens with a group of girls playing soccer on a beach — suggesting a relaxed atmosphere, but simultaneously conveying a more serious message, about the girls breaking into a male-dominated world (football). Quite predictably, the girls' joint efforts are ridiculed by the boys watching by, who do not take the girls' team seriously and do not appreciate their athletic skills.

This opening scene is filmed in an alternation of slow and fast motion, with close-ups of the girls' feet dribbling the ball, interspersed with freeze-frames to allow the introduction of the cast in colourful cartoon-like images, clearly pointing out that the film is going to be a comedy. Briefly, the movie is the story of Viola Hastings, whose girl soccer team at Cornwall has been cut. As her initial choice of joining the boys' team fails, she decides to impersonate her twin brother at his new high school Illyria, while he is pursuing a music dream in London. Once the real Sebastian comes back and has to play in the Illyria soccer team against Cornwall, everything is revealed, and Viola, whose football skills have improved considerably, manages to win the match against her former boyfriend's team.

On the other hand, *O* deals with a more serious and aggressive, male-to-male competition, focusing on the protagonists' endeavours to display a series of features that make up the stereotypical masculine identity kit: success, power and control. Throughout the film, they strive to appear physically strong, in charge of every situation, famous and popular among girl-peers. The opening scenes feature some doves while the soundtrack of Verdi's *Otello* is playing, setting a serious tone for the movie to begin, but also, probably, hinting at the Columbine shootings that occurred in 1999 (Rosenberg, 2003), when the movie was initially programmed to be released, with the doves acting as an embodiment of the high school's Latin name. *O* tells the stories of Hugo, whose father is the coach of the basketball team, and of Odin James, the only black teammate. The original Desdemona becomes Desi, the Dean's daughter, while Michael Cassio is Odin's right-hand on the basketball court. Hugo's elaborate plan ends in the deaths of Desi, Roger (the rich boy who also loves Desi), Emily, and Odin's suicide, while he himself is taken to prison.

If, in the case of *She's the Man*, there is no hint at the beginning that it will be an adaptation of Shakespeare's play, with *O*, the opera music playing as the first scene opens may indirectly establish a lyrical, tragic framework in which the plot develops. Conversely, unlike in *She's the Man*, where most of the characters' original names are preserved (e.g. Viola, Sebastian, Olivia, Duke as a proper name replacing the Shakespearean character's aristocratic title), the names in *O* only echo the 17<sup>th</sup> century protagonists (Odin/O, Desi, Hugo Em/Emily). In the latter film, several intertextual references complicate the viewer's perception of the original story even further, anchoring it more in contemporariness: the protagonist's initials, O.J. (Odin James), remind us of O.J. Simpson and his widely televised story, considered then yet another — although, this time, real-life — staging of Othello.

The association of Odin with another murderer, together with the rather recent (at the time of the film's making) shootings of Columbine and other American high schools, create in the viewers' minds a feeling of foreboding. Furthermore, in our opinion, basketball is not a random choice to illustrate Odin's drama. Initially invented as a sport for elite white college students, professional basketball is now dominated by African-Americans, who are responsible for bringing speed and dexterity into the game. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, basketball left the academic curriculum and stepped down and out in the street, offering youngsters a pleasant pastime opportunity and building their personality in the 'true American spirit' (Donald, 2008; "Streetball", 2008).

The most important scenes in *O* take place immediately before or during a basketball game, with five games all in all. The first and the second game introduce the protagonists — Odin and Hugo. The dove scene with Hugo's overvoice claiming that he has always wanted to be a hawk and soar above others is immediately followed by a close-up of a hawk (which is also the team's mascot and name) spreading its wings. The evocation of this bird is a reminder of a hugely popular leitmotif in American cinema — the competitiveness of the American spirit, the hawk being a national icon.

It also draws a parallel between the fictional team and the real and famous basketball team called the Atlanta Hawks. The jump cut to a close-up of Odin's sweaty face follows the close-up of the hawk, leading the viewer to associate the African-American player with the bird, thus alluding to Odin's skill at playing the game and foregrounding his possible future career in the professional sport. The association of O, as he is called by his team-

mates, with the bird clearly sets him further apart from the rest of the team; in addition to being the only African-American player in the high school, he is the most talented one.

O is mostly shot indoors, which alludes to the double inner conflict: the rivalry among the members of the same team (Hugo — Odin — Mike) and, later on, Odin's insecurity and hesitation about Hugo's story. As Odin is the first character to be introduced, the viewers are manipulated into perceiving the story from his point of view and perhaps even identifying with him, the player who seems to have it all: fame, popularity, and the most beautiful girl in the school. Simultaneously, Odin's sweat-covered face signals his own strife for social integration and success in an otherwise "all white" milieu by means of his talent and hard work.

The technique employed relies mostly on camera motion, with many panning and tiltings (horizontal and vertical movements of the camera), combined with jump cuts (rapid succession of shots from different angles) that are meant to create an alert rhythm and convey the adrenalin surge of the game, highlighting not only an atmosphere of suspense, but also a more abstract comment on basic sports values such as teamwork and trustworthiness. While diegetic sound focuses on spectators cheering Odin, extradiegetic sound features hip-hop music, which stands — together with basketball — for African American lifestyle and "a new version of the American dream [...] for young black men" (Boyd, 2003), singling Odin out in yet another manner. The lyrics, in the form of a short dialogue ("Who's the black star? Who? Me!"), play an emphatic role in the hero's portrayal, while such phrases as "black is the colour of my true love's heart" set O and Desi as the perfect couple, united by love, trust, and respect, beyond the political and racial issues contained by the notion of miscegenation.

Comparatively, in *She's the Man*, characters are more subject to prejudices and stereotypical thinking, the most conspicuous victims being the young women who strive for equality and professional dignity. The alternation of high-angle and low-angle shots, as Viola is pleading with the coach to be allowed to join the boys' team after the girls' team has been cut from the program, renders the tension between men's and women's horizon of expectations. Quite predictably, this includes mainly a series of biological clichés: women are not comparable to men, hence inferior in terms of physical strength, stamina and skill. Being mad about football and thus a rebellious woman-to-be, who does not comply with the socially construct-

ed ideal of femininity as “beautiful, small, thin and weak” (Roth and Basow, 2004: 249), Viola sets out to prove that she is able to compete against men as an equal.

Viola’s trouble in finding a balance between her feminine and masculine identities and her anxieties of not being able to fulfill her dream manifests itself in a nightmare she has after her first practice as a boy. Having been allowed to play against the Cornwall team, she cannot do it properly because of the pink debutante dress that her mother has chosen especially for the occasion. While the other players seem to be engaged in a life and death competition, the many petticoats she is wearing prevent her from running fast and make her fall flat on her back just when she is about to score. In contrast to the comic effect created by the scene, the players’ yells overlap with and then turn into lions’ roars, suggesting a tough masculine game, where a girl can only be an alien intruder. The low-key lighting also contributes to the feeling of tension and aggression, standing for a twofold threat: on the one hand, the menace Viola may embody in the eyes of her male peers — proving that she can be their equal — and, on the other, the “harm” playing a men’s game can do to herself, diminishing and even annihilating her “girly” features.

By comparison, the pressure on Odin’s ego reaches a climax just before the slams championship, which is Odin’s chance at being spotted and recruited for a professional team directly from high school. Having lost sleep over the possible affair he was reported on, Odin resorts to drugs to help him perform well. Alluding to one of the most worrying aspects of (not only American) high school life, Odin’s use of drugs represents the materialization of his thoughts tormented by jealousy and the beginning of his downfall. Moreover, the slow motion scene of his dunking the ball increases the tension, adds up to a feeling of foreboding and points to Odin’s change in behaviour: he shatters the glass backboard, which, besides standing for a manifestation of his wrath, is meant to remind viewers of an event involving Michael Jordan, the best American Basketball player of all times, in Italy in 1986 (Walter, 1997). The scene draws a parallel between the two, with Odin proving similar strength and skill and signing a similar success story.

Because of Hugo’s machinations, O loses everything he once enjoyed and is led to suicide. Hugo’s final remarks, made in overvoice, about Odin being the real hawk — “powerful, determined and dark”, with Verdi’s

Othello playing symmetrically in the background — are illustrative of what egotism and the thirst for fame can lead to. Simultaneously, they stand for values which are highly appraised by pop culture in general, such as fame, wealth and intense socialization, irresistible incentives especially for the youth segment of the public. The message conveyed is that violence and self-destruction stem from false perceptions and the tendency to distill, in a consumerist variant of Bovarism, the pettiness of every-day life events into sublime or tragic grandeur.

In *She's the Man*, the conflictual situation is presented, nevertheless, in a humorous manner. As she has proven dedication, skill and respect for teamwork, Viola/ Sebastian is allowed to play in the game but the real Sebastian's return complicates things, since he is not a talented football player. When the truth is unveiled, the argument between the two coaches whether Viola should be (re)included in the boys' team is solved by the Illyria coach who boasts that "here at Illyria, we don't discriminate on gender". This apparently casual reply creates the image of an idealized micro-society, where boys and girls are given equal chances to prove their skill, but also contains more subversive overtones, shifting the emphasis from sexual segregation to other forms of discrimination, especially the inequalities in the American educational system, which clearly distinguish between private and public schools.

The game scenes are filmed in a succession of jump cuts, alternating medium close-ups of players and close-ups of feet dribbling the ball, high-angle and low-angle shots, against a background of rhythmic music that keeps the game alert, at the same time highlighting the players' skill, hard work and commitment, as well as the importance of teamwork in achieving victory. When Viola obtains a penalty kick, she finally has the opportunity to prove her 'point' and score against Cornwall, thus demonstrating that she is as good at football as any of the boys. Even though she does not succeed at first, with Duke's help, Viola manages to defeat the Cornwall team, thus demonstrating that women *are* able to compete against men, and that teamwork, trust and respect among players stand forth as the core values of team sports in general and soccer in particular.

Nonetheless, the heroine's evolution in a patriarchal system is possible only with the support of the male establishment. In other words, the film's essential point is that men can be challenged and defeated with their approval only. The medium close-up of Justin crying and alluding to some

kind of ‘foul play’ when he is unable to accept defeat, while the Illyria team is enjoying victory and celebrating “the day’s heroine”, further distinguishes between ‘gamesmanship’, winning at all costs for personal fame, and ‘sportsmanship’, the true spirit of sports that promotes teamwork, commitment to principles, pursuit of excellence, and a dignified acceptance of victory or defeat. Much like Shakespeare’s original comedy protagonist, Viola teaches men a lesson in a situation which would not have normally been offered to her. In other words, she finds herself in the middle of a paradox: she could not have offered them a moralizing example had she not flouted the rules in the first place. She succeeds in renegotiating her status and role, being finally accepted as a full member of the boys’ community.

### 3. Conclusion

In addition to sharing the motif of sports and a comic or tragic insight into stereotypical patterns of thinking, both *O* and *She’s the Man* raise questions about violence, breaking patterns, fair play and work ethics. Being the stuff of dreams, sports can teach teenagers that, in order to become successful adults, they must learn to abide by the basic rules and values of society, namely ethics, tolerance, teamwork, fairness and respect.

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# BING AND NOTHINGNESS: THE LAST NAMED AGONIST IN SAMUEL BECKETT'S FICTION

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**Abstract:** *Beckett's late fiction is characterized by concision, sparseness and an absence of names. The mid-1960s text 'Bing/Ping' is the last in which it is possible to discern traces of the author's lifelong impulse to name both a character and himself and, in so doing, to make one final identification of himself with Christ.*

**Keywords:** *Christ, Irish literature, onomastics, Samuel Beckett.*

## 1. Introduction

This paper takes the form of a meditation on a word. The word, or mantra, in question is the monosyllable, 'bing'. The reason for wishing to explore and tease out the resonances of this little nugget of sounds and letters is that it was the enigmatic title given by Samuel Beckett to one of his later prose works in French, a micro-novel of less than 1,000 words. The text was published as a limited edition slim volume in France in 1966 and translated into English by the author himself, first appearing in print in the literary periodical *Encounter* in February 1967, under the English title of *Ping*. Thus, there are in fact two words in play here: 'bing' and 'ping', and the game of ping-bing in which we are about to engage will necessarily involve both terms, oscillating unstably between one and the other in an effort to catch fleeting glimpses of their ever-deferred meanings.

Despite its brevity, *Bing/Ping* (as I will now call it) was a text on which Beckett expended an extraordinary amount of time and effort. It is possible to trace the genesis of the work through 16 distinct manuscript drafts in French<sup>1</sup> and through at least 3 reworkings in English<sup>2</sup>. What remains in the final versions is a distillate, free of all superfluous matter. In linguistic terms, this can be seen through the sparse articles, prepositions and punctuation marks, the virtual absence of pronouns, conjunctions and finite verbs and the disconnectedness between the word-islands that constitute the text.

And yet, even though the text is extremely condensed and telegraphic, there is an enormous amount of repetition. The 946 words that constitute the entirety of *Bing* feature just 122 different words, with the word 'blanc' (white) repeated 82 times and 'bing' itself 19 times, excluding the title. Critical commentary on this work has tended to take the form of structuralist analysis, or textual genesis, or else looks at Beckett's practice as self-translator<sup>3</sup>. Quite remarkably, however, none of these approaches has chosen to focus on the title itself and its 'translation' from *Bing* to *Ping*.

## 2. Readings, Interpretations

Before starting to analyse the title, it is first necessary to make some tentative attempt at getting to grips with the highly unusual form/content of the text. The fullest traditional reading of the piece that I have found in print was published by David Lodge in *Encounter* exactly a year after *Ping* appeared in the same journal. He offers a composite reading based on his own insights and those of a group of scholars whom he gathered together to discuss the work. Rather than paraphrase his already compressed commentary, I will quote part of it verbatim:

I suggest that 'Ping' is the rendering of the consciousness of a person confined in a small, bare, white room, a person who is evidently under extreme duress, and probably at the last gasp of life. He has no freedom of movement: his body is 'fixed,' the legs are joined together, the heels turning at right angles, the hands hanging palms front; the 'heart breath' makes 'no sound'. 'Only the eyes only just...' — can we say, *move*? There are parts of the room he cannot see, and he evidently can't move his head to see them, though he thinks there is 'perhaps a way out' there. The first words of the piece are 'all known,' and this phrase recurs. But the 'all' that is 'known' is severely limited and yields 'no meaning' though the narrator is reluctant to admit this: 'perhaps a meaning'. 'Ping' seems to record the struggles of an expiring consciousness to find some meaning in a situation which offers no purchase to the mind or to sensation. The consciousness makes repeated, feeble efforts to assert the possibility of colour, movement, sound, memory, another person's presence, only to fall back hopelessly into the recognition of colourlessness, paralysis, silence, oblivion, solitude. This rhythm of tentative assertion and collapse is marked by the frequently recurring collocation 'only just about never'.<sup>4</sup>

Lodge and his co-readers considered possible meanings of the word 'ping', initially treating it as an onomatopoeic word, indicating a certain

sound: a bullet ricocheting, dripping water, a bicycle bell or a typewriter bell<sup>5</sup>. None of these interpretations, however, seems to fit in with the tone or imagery of the piece and they serve to detract from rather than enrich any reading of the text as a whole. Lodge himself favoured the view that 'ping' was 'a noise external to the discourse'<sup>6</sup>, whereas certain unnamed others saw it as 'a code-word for some concept that cannot be fully and openly entertained, such as God (cf. Godot). Thus, the sentence 'Ping elsewhere always there only known not' becomes almost lucid if you replace *Ping* with *God*<sup>7</sup>. His reading group also focused on a number of words which, unusually in this piece, occur only once: nails, hair, flesh, torn and scars. Associating these with the oft-repeated phrases, 'legs joined like sewn', 'hands hanging palm front' and 'seam like sewn invisible' they arrived at a tentative reading of the text as representing the dying consciousness of Christ in the tomb<sup>8</sup>. I find this a compelling interpretation, and one which I intend to substantiate through my exploration of the title.

In the French text, of the 19 occurrences of the word 'bing', 8 are capitalized; the figures for 'ping' are 21 and 13 respectively. The discrepancy between these figures is largely attributable to the fact that 'ping' is used as a 'translation' of 'hop' and well as 'bing'. The reason for capitalization is that the word sometimes occurs in sentence initial position and, in these texts, Beckett adheres to the orthographic convention of using capital letters after full-stops. However, the occurrence of bing/ping at the start of a sentence (where the subject is usually placed), combined with capitalization (an orthographic characteristic of proper names rather than common nouns), leads me to consider the possibility that bing/ping may be, at least in part, a proper name. Since the text is struggling to formulate or assemble an entity out of disparate and fragmentary body parts (head, hair, ears, nose, eyes, mouth, heart, breath, hands, legs, heels, feet, toes, nails...) it may be that occasionally they coalesce sufficiently for that entity to be named, as in the phrases, 'Ping murmur perhaps a nature one second'<sup>9</sup> and 'Ping of old only just perhaps a meaning'<sup>10</sup>. It is my contention that this pair of names, or quasi-names, constitute the last link in the onomastic chain that can be traced right back to the beginnings of Beckett's fictional oeuvre.

### 3. Naming practices

Within the scope of this paper I can give no more than the most summary outline of Beckett's ingenious naming practices, though the full story

can be found in my book on Beckettian onomastics — *Change All the Names*. In order to understand the place of Bing as the last avatar in a 35-year long series, a number of factors must be borne in mind:

1. Beckett tended to name fictional works after his male protagonists, e.g. Murphy, Watt, Molloy and Malone.
2. Beckett had a special affinity for certain letters (in particular B and M), which may be understood as his sigla or personal signs. In the case of B (the initial of his first protagonist, Belacqua), the source is clearly B for Beckett; the M is rather more involved, being a rotation of the Greek  $\Sigma$  (sigma), i.e. S for Samuel.
3. In my view, a major theme running through Beckett's entire fictional output is the search for a name. His own given name, Samuel, has the meaning in Hebrew of 'name of God', with Sam meaning simply 'name'. His given name is, therefore, merely a place-marker, awaiting the true name, which it is his goal as a creative artist to discover and reveal, and in so doing, to reveal the true name of God.
4. Encoded in the names of several of Beckett's earlier protagonists are references to both himself and to Christ (e.g. Murphy, Watt, Mercier, Camier, Macmann). As Estragon notes in *Waiting for Godot* (doubtlessly echoing the author's own feelings) "All my life I've compared myself to him"<sup>11</sup> — him being Christ. Nor is this link solely based on the author's name for, as the unnamed narrator of Beckett's late novel *Company* is at pains to point out, 'You first saw the light of day the day Christ died'<sup>12</sup>. Indeed, Samuel Beckett was born on Good Friday, which also happened to be a Friday, 13<sup>th</sup>.
5. The virtually interchangeable names of the agonist in Beckett's last extensive fictional work prior to *Bing/Ping, How It Is*, include the remarkably similar variants, Bim and Pim: 'a few scraps Bim Pim proper names presumably'<sup>13</sup>.
6. After *Bing/Ping*, none of the protagonists in any of the fictional works produced by Beckett in the last 22 years of his life bears a name, allowing for the possibility of considering Bing/Ping as the last in a series.

#### 4. Famous Bings

So, if Bing may be thought of as a name, the salient questions to ask are: what is the motivation behind its choice and what could the name sig-

nify within the text? The first point to note is that Bing is well-attested as a family name, being both an English name of uncertain origin (most famously borne by Admiral George Byng, who captured Gibraltar in 1704) and a German Jewish name derived from the town of Bingen in the Rhineland<sup>14</sup>. The German Bings include two bearers whose existence would doubtlessly have impinged on Beckett's consciousness and may have played some small part in the name choice in this text.

The first was Siegfried Bing (1838-1905), also known as Samuel Bing, a celebrated art dealer in Paris at the turn of the century. He had his own pavilion at the Exposition Universelle of 1900 which traded under the name of 'L'Art Nouveau, La Maison Bing'. The other bearer was a celebrated avant-garde photographer called Ilse Bing (1899-1998). She lived and worked in Paris throughout the 1930s before being interned by the Nazis and finally emigrating to the United States. Her work was, of course, in shades of black, white and grey (the predominant colour scheme of Beckett's *Bing*) but her most famous images are penetrating self-portraits, including one from 1931 which shows fragments of her image in a number of mirrors beside a head and shoulders image of herself with the Leica camera she used.

These German Bings are, however, of only secondary importance in comparison with another bearer of this name, born in Washington State in 1903 to an Irish mother and christened Harry Lillis Crosby, but known to the world as Bing Crosby. Bing was a nickname bestowed on Crosby as a boy, its origin being a feature in a comic paper called the 'Bingville Bugle'. A neighbour, who shared Crosby's love of this story, dubbed him 'Bingo from Bingville', which quickly got shortened to Bing. The Bing Crosby story is a classic fulfilment of the American Dream — talent, hard work and a good slice of luck enabling a kid from a humble background to become a world-famous multi-millionaire.

Indeed, it is hard to over-estimate the success and status achieved by Crosby in his heyday, during the 1940s and 1950s. At the end of the Second World War he was acclaimed by American troops as the individual who had done most to keep up their morale. In 1948, he was voted as the most admired individual alive and it was estimated that roughly half of all recorded music broadcast on radio in that year featured the voice of Bing Crosby. According to the Wikipedia entry on Crosby, his is the most electronically recorded human voice in history. Crosby was the perfect all-round enter-

tainer, seeming to sing, dance, act and wise-crack effortlessly and appearing to be best friends with the whole world. What better credentials could be sought therefore if we were looking for a modern Messiah?

What Samuel Beckett thought of Crosby is not preserved anywhere, but it is inconceivable that Beckett was unaware of the Crosby phenomenon and would have heard his records and seen his films. It is, however, hard to imagine two more dissimilar artists circa 1950: the one celebrated, popular, easy-going; the other unknown, socially awkward and tortured. And yet, that image of a polar opposite may have held some attraction for Beckett as an unattainable other or alter ego. Thus far, the links I have attempted to make between Beckett and Crosby are highly tenuous. The time has come to make the case for seeing the shadow of Bing Crosby behind the ghostly image of Beckett's Bing.

## 5. The Crosby Connection

As a movie actor Crosby was most famous for appearing in a series of romantic, comedy adventure films between 1940 and 1962 with co-stars Leslie Townes Hope (1903-2003) (aka Bob Hope) and Mary Leta Dorothy Slaton (1914-1996) (aka Dorothy Lamour). The films were known as the 'Road to...' movies, since they were all entitled 'The Road to...' somewhere, the destination always being exotic and glamorous (e.g. Zanzibar, Bali and even Utopia). During the war years and post-war austerity these films offered some much-needed escapism and proved to be huge box-office successes around the world.

The road is, of course, a very familiar Beckettian topos — a very bleak and featureless road being the setting for *Waiting for Godot* — symbolizing the need for movement, a quest, the journey through life, as opposed to the confined locus of the womb-tomb room. Who are the figures on a journey in the Hollywood quest movies? By name they are Crosby, Hope and Lamour. The first of these can be analysed as 'by the Cross': through Christ's death on the cross mankind is saved, as long as we have faith in him. Hope is transparently 'hope' whilst Lamour is simply the French for 'love'. Thus the names of the three travellers along the road can be resolved into the meanings of faith, hope and love, the three theological virtues specifically mentioned by St. Paul in I Corinthians 1, 13 as being the central components of the Christian life.

Having now seen in the name Crosby a reference to the cross and Christ, it is as well to remind ourselves that Beckett exhorted his readers to look for meaning, not in what is said but, 'between the phrases, communicated by the intervals, not the terms, of the statement'<sup>15</sup>. Thus Bing points mutely to the implied but unspoken collocation with Crosby and Christ. A still more telling chain of association can be discerned if we look at the song for which Bing Crosby will forever be remembered. In 1942 he recorded a song by Irving Berlin which became the Christmas no. 1 record that year and which, to this day, remains the best-selling single of all-time, as attested by the 2008 edition of *The Guinness Book of Records*.

That song was the sentimental evocation of a perfect, long-lost past entitled 'White Christmas'. In that title we find not only the endlessly repeated keyword 'white' (occurring 91 times in *Ping*) but even the discarded title to Beckett's own piece — 'Blanc' immediately preceding 'Bing' as the working title of Beckett's final manuscript draft. And as 'Bing' leads us to the unspoken 'Crosby', so 'white' inevitably evokes 'Christmas', which not only calls to mind Christ and his birth but links Christ with a mirror image of our author: Christ-mas, Christ-Sam.

Two more points link Crosby with the now heavily over-determined signifier 'bing' in Beckett's short work. In the late 1940s, the singer made a substantial investment in a new technology which he was also the first recording artist to master: pre-recording his radio shows on magnetic tape. Indeed, Crosby's sponsorship of the pioneering firm Ampex contributed in no small measure to the rapid spread of the tape-recorder revolution in the 1950s. Thus Beckett owes a direct artistic debt to Bing Crosby, for without his efforts the author might well not have been able to conceive *Krapp's Last Tape*.

In 1953 Beckett was living in Paris and beginning to receive his first critical recognition following the early performances of *En attendant Godot* and the publication of his trilogy of novels. At the very same time, the world's most successful recording artist released his first long-playing record. Bizarrely, it was recorded entirely in French and entitled 'Le Bing: Song Hits of Paris'. Once again, Beckett could not have been oblivious of this fact and this synchronicity of crossed destinies may have played some part in his choice of word-name 13 years later.

The mantra bing has thus been converted into the man-trap Bing, and it seems a perfectly apposite quasi-name for a half-evoked Christ figure

through the range of Crosby associations. In addition, and considering the unit morphologically, the B for Beckett is followed by the continuous suffix ‘-ing’, suggesting the continuity of life or ‘be-ing’ until an end is reached with ‘bing silence’ and ‘ping over’. Why then should Beckett choose to change the enormously rich find which is ‘bing’ for the relatively impoverished ‘ping’ in English?

## 6. Conclusion

I suspect that the answer is in part related to Beckett’s reasons for switching from writing in English to writing principally in French. He claimed that he wanted to be able to write without style, and part of that mysterious thing called style is the wealth of associations which familiar words call to mind. The word-name ‘bing’ was at once too rich and, I believe, to Beckett’s mind, too obvious. In the French text ‘bing’ would clearly stand out as an exonym, alien to the French linguistic system. In English, however, it not only bespeaks its be-ing but inevitably prompts an associative chain with Bing Crosby, leading to a critical disinterment of the author’s hidden motivations.

Beckett loved to conceal and to cover his traces and the inversion of little ‘b’ to little ‘p’ effectively hides the source of the word-name from casual, monolingual English readers. With the advent of ‘Ping’ new traces are added but, crucially for the self-effacing self-publicist, three voices are concealed: the voice of Bing Crosby, the voice of the author and the voice of the sound itself — /b/ being a voiced and /p/ an unvoiced bilabial plosive. Thus, the being of Beckett, multiply linked to the being of Christ via the monosyllable ‘bing’, is rotated into an emptily resonant ‘ping’ — perhaps the sound of a round, white golf ball sweetly struck by a Ping golf club up into the blue almost white infinite...?<sup>16</sup>

## Notes

1. Ten manuscript drafts of the text that would become *Bing* were reproduced in an appendix to Federman and Fletcher’s bibliography of Beckett (1970). In Admussen’s guide to the Beckett manuscripts, however, a further six drafts were revealed, all sixteen having been written between late July and late August 1966. The word ‘bing’ first appears in the seventh draft. No titles are given to any but the final draft, which is entitled ‘BLANC’, crossed out and replaced by “BING”.



2. Admussen notes three drafts to *Ping* prior to the corrected galley proof, but suggests that at least one more draft is missing. The first manuscript draft is entitled 'Pfft', followed by two untitled, typed versions, before the appearance of 'PING' as the title on the galley proof.
3. See, in particular, Fitch's *Beckett and Babel* and Segrè's 'Style and Structure in Beckett's "Ping": *That Something Itself.*'
4. Lodge's essay is reproduced in Graver and Federman (1979), pp. 291-301.
5. Graver and Federman, p. 297.
6. *Ibid.* p. 298
7. *Ibid.*
8. Beckett — *No's Knife.* p.166.
9. Graver and Federman, p. 298, *passim.*
10. *Ibid.* p.167.
11. Beckett. *Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 51.
12. Beckett. *Company*, p. 20.
13. Beckett. *How It Is*, p. 89.
14. Hanks & Hodges, p. 52.
15. Beckett. *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, p.138.
16. The trade name Ping was first used by Kirsten Solheim, inventor of a radical new putter, in 1959. To him, the name captured the sound made when the putter struck the ball. By the mid-1960s Ping equipment was widely used by professionals and amateurs and in 1966 the USPGA banned the use of Ping clubs, deeming that they gave players an unfair advantage. Throughout his life Beckett was a keen golfer...

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*BETWEEN  
THE CONTINENTS*



# THE ADVENTURES OF AN ARTFUL DODGER: ON WRITERS AND WRITING IN CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIA

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**Abstract:** *The paper explores a range of issues tackled by Michael Wilding in his latest novel National Treasure (2007). Following Academia Nuts (2002), which exposes the follies of the Australian academic establishment, National Treasure focuses on the Australian literary world, revealing it to be not much different from the world of show business, where a Darwinian battle for survival rages.*

**Keywords:** *Australian literary world, intertextuality, postmodernism, Wilding.*

## 1. Introduction

It may come as a surprise and thwart readers' expectations that a novel about the literary world should open with a scene fit for a crime story. Michael Wilding's latest novel, *National Treasure*, does just that. It starts in a dark alley, just off one of the main streets in inner-city Sydney, with a row of cafés and restaurants where people are "chewing into their well pounded veal and octopus, filleting their whole fish or nibbling at their rucicola salad, sipping up their granitos through the crushed ice, getting stuck into their sambucas" (Wilding, 2007: 10), while just around the corner a young man is being severely beaten up by two young men. From a safe distance, trying not to reveal his presence, a man, suggestively named Plant, witnesses the brutal attack, sitting calmly in his car and enjoying a freshly rolled joint.

The unfortunate man, ironically named Fullalove, has been hired as a research assistant by the distinguished, big-selling author to conduct research for his forthcoming novel about the illegal trade in human body parts. Literature and unlawful criminal actions continue hand in hand as Wilding introduces other characters and weaves a web of intertextual references and literary allusions, valuable bread crumbs left for readers to find

their way in what Wilding presents as the sinister forest of gloomy issues besieging the contemporary world of fiction-writing in Australia.

## **2. The dark forest of contemporary Australian fiction-writing**

### **2.1. The issue of plagiarism**

Not before long, it is revealed that the title hero, “National Treasure”, Scobie Spruce, came into the literary limelight only after having been accused of plagiarism. Vicious attacks by literary critics brought him to the front pages and stirred public curiosity and interest in his novels, which then became best-sellers. “It’s a funny country, you know,” reflects Scobie. “It must be the convict settlement. Once they accuse you of some dreadful thing in the papers you’ve made it. It’s like you’ve got to have committed a crime to become a successful Australian” (Wilding, 2007: 27-28). This ironic remark cuts to the core of very sensitive issues of Australian national identity, the convict origins of Australian society and culture, as well as of the resulting notion of the cultural cringe.

That there is a thin line dividing legal and illegal, stealing someone else’s ideas and paying them flattering respects, Scobie is to learn at a seminar on plagiarism, which he attends at his publishers’ insistence — “it’ll sell books, they said” (Wilding, 2007: 28). A poet at the seminar gives Scobie a piece of friendly advice that he should follow the example of academics, who use a footnote whenever they copy someone so that, far from being offended, the original authors feel honoured and important (it helps their citation index and they put it in their CVs). Wilding embeds here a satirical sting from his previous novel, *Academia Nuts* (2002), aimed at Australian universities which have taken a degrading plunge from elevated seats of learning with no political or commercial strings attached into the dark pits of politicised, profit-oriented competitive institutions struggling to sell their “products” to the highest bidder.

Footnotes in a novel? Why not, “it’ll be post-modern” (Wilding, 2007: 29), Scobie explains to the confounded Plant, who has filled the vacant position of Scobie’s research assistant, thus stepping into the world of Australian literary production and hoping that Scobie will prove to be a stepping stone on the way to his own success. Using the character of Plant as focaliser, Wilding gives a satirical view of the literary world. Plant will soon realise

that in the world of art it is not enough to climb the mountain of success, but it is of utmost importance to master the art of staying on top.

## 2.2. Literature as enterprise

In that respect, literary circles are akin to the fiercely competitive world of show business, wherein a Darwinian battle for survival rages. Successful writers, like music or film stars, are soon plagued by a parasitic pest of agents, publishers, editors, media, and even their own partners or families. Somewhere along the way Scobie has lost his talent but acquired a pill-popping habit and ended up as a prisoner in his own home, the golden goose, under the watchful eye of his partner, Claudia.

Claudia — “a rich bitch witch” (Wilding, 2007: 135), as another female character refers to her in spiteful rhythm and rhyme — wants fame and social status in addition to money and has chosen Scobie to be her ticket to high social circles. The two of them are less a romantic couple than business partners in a joint venture of keeping Scobie’s head above the literary current and preserving the illusion of his eminence and renown. As the story unfolds, exposing the “national treasure” as a fraud who exploits his research assistant to the point that Plant takes over the writing of Scobie’s fiction and magazine article commissions, readers become aware of a darker subtext which contains a story about the manipulative nature of the literary establishment.

As pointed out in the *Sydney Morning Herald’s* review of the book (2007: online), “the contemporary Australian literary establishment has become the willing slave of the market. All activity revolves around product, commodity, sales and spin; the actual creative process becomes a farce and a mockery. Relationships between writers are driven by rivalry and competition”. *National Treasure* reflects several decades of Wilding’s insider knowledge of the Australian literary community, his first-hand experience of the pressurised life of the novelist and an understanding of the machinery made of writers, publishers, promoters and readerships. It is that complex mechanism that Wilding takes apart minutely and with a lot of humour.

In his review, Nigel Krauth sums up several threads running through the novel and notices that “this novel pokes fun at literary folly; gets serious about business and government and media exploitation and the dismantling of literature’s value in the current context; but also reveals the tragedy of the personal plight of the creative writer in today’s culture” (2007: online).

Wilding's hilarious black comedy criticises a society which values literature in terms of money (the attitude most prominently taken by Claudia's wealthy father, Daddy), while its self-seeking and self-important literary community is infested with envy, duplicity, jealousy and corruption (most vividly portrayed in the malicious rivalry of Scobie and Tuscan Bayes).

*National Treasure* is a both depressing and funny study of the writing industry, where those who do not incessantly publish inevitably perish unless they become artful dodgers. According to Claudia's father, Scobie is exactly of that kind:

"These are all airport novels."

"That I see," said Daddy. "This is an airport. These are novels. So, airport novels. So?"

"They are rubbish," said Claudia. "Scobie is an artist."

"Art," said Daddy. "Art is money. I told you that already. No money, no art. So what is Scobie, the artful dodger, heh?" (Wilding, 2007: 125)

### **2.3. Literature as violent conspiracy**

The notion that the world of literature has become inextricably and dangerously entangled with money and power games, the world of politics, the criminal underground, multinational corporations, and media manipulation is reinforced by one of the first intertextual references in the novel. While the injured Fullalove is bleeding over carpets in Scobie's hall, the two of them debate whether it was *Fire on the Snow* or *Blood on the Snow* that Douglas Stewart wrote. The well-known verse play, describing the British explorer Robert Falcon Scott's expedition to Antarctica in 1912, written by a major twentieth century Australian poet, short-story writer, essayist and editor gets mixed up in Fullalove's mind with the title of an investigative account of the assassination of the Swedish Prime Minister, Olof Palme (Bondeson, 2005).

Olof Palme was shot dead on the streets of Stockholm in February 1986 and left bleeding in the snow until the gravely belated arrival of the police, who did not even recognise the victim as the Prime Minister. Palme's killing made a similarly shocking impact on the Scandinavian public as the Kennedy assassinations did across the United States and triggered as numerous conspiracy theories.



It is through the character of Fullalove (full of bile, rather) that the murky world of clandestine dealings and violence in the literary world is most overtly presented in the novel. His embittered and disillusioned account of how “multinationals had [him] followed, drove [him] mad, tried to kill [him]” (Wilding, 2007: 34) and ruined both his promising career and his life, might seem to resemble at first the paranoid ravings of a delusional man. However, as the novel progresses towards the end, when it becomes clear that Scobie is done for both as a writer and as a person and Plant enters Tuscan Bayes’s house to collect his final cheque, when there is no doubt that Plant has been ‘a plant’ all along, Fullalove’s fears and conspiracy theories do not appear to be so irrational after all.

The intertextual frame for the issue of infiltration and espionage is set as early as Chapter 2, when Plant refers to Fullalove as “the man who was beaten up” (Wilding, 2007: 17). This conjures up a series of titles in Scobie’s mind, such as: *The Man Who Was Thursday*, Chesterton’s novel where poets turn out to be undercover detectives; *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, a 1956 Alfred Hitchcock film with a plot of political assassination; *The Man Who Never Was*, a 1954 book by Ewen Montagu and a 1956 World War II war film based on the book, about Operation ‘Mincemeat,’ a 1943 British Intelligence plan to deceive the Axis powers into thinking Operation ‘Husky,’ the Allied invasion of Sicily, would take place elsewhere.

With *A Man for All Seasons*, the frame is broadened to include the issue of one’s conscience, honesty, truthfulness to oneself and beliefs under all circumstances and at all times. Unlike the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Chancellor of England, Sir Thomas More, all of the major characters of Wilding’s novel succumb to external pressure and influence. In a similar fashion, the romantic story of *A Man and a Woman* bears a negative comparison with *National Treasure*, since Claudia and Scobie’s relationship is all about investment, not love. As soon as Claudia has gone to Europe, Scobie ends up on a cocaine and sex binge with a fellow writer, Nada. Then, we see him bed both Claudia’s mother and Daddy’s au pair, while Claudia, after Scobie has been incapacitated by medication, turns to the research assistant Plant for “sexual assistance,” which he readily provides.

*The Man Who Loved Islands*, a 1929 D. H. Lawrence short-story, resonates with Scobie’s personal plight of a confined life, lack of social contact and the resulting loss of identity and integrity. While, by his own admission, Scobie strives for *verité*, authenticity and gritty realism, he is cursed by

Claudia's possessiveness, jealousy and the fear of losing her investment and is rarely allowed a glimpse of the world outside their comfortable house overlooking the harbour. Hired research assistants, therefore, perform for Scobie the role of the Lady of Shalott's mirror and Nada, who takes him out of his 'island castle,' is Scobie's Lancelot, who spells the end of his life as an artist. In Fullalove's view, Nada is an instrument of the multinationals, aimed at the destruction of talented and intelligent free artists who cannot be dictated what to write. She is "the angel of death," "the grim reaper of the literary purges" (Wilding, 2007: 168).

#### **2.4. Reality and fiction**

The issue of the author's personal versus creative life is approached from several angles in Wilding's novel. Are writers to write about the world while remaining in their ivory towers or should they immerse themselves in whatever awaits beyond? If they do venture out, what part will the experience play in their fiction? How much bearing does the writer's personal life have on the interpretation of his texts? There is no doubt in Nada's mind that Scobie is entombed in his house, "a mausoleum", as she dubs it seeing the hallway lined with paintings and photographs of Scobie, framed posters of readings he has given and the cover art of books he has published. "How could you ever write in this?" she wonders and adds "You need to live again" (Wilding, 2007: 136).

To Scobie, reality is a skeleton that needs to be fleshed out (Wilding, 2007: 22). He takes an anti-positivistic stance in his wish to burn his manuscripts, correspondence, photographs and postcards rather than sell them to the National Library as Claudia insists. He does not want either biographers or critics to work on him because the interest in writers' lives and the 'person' of the author kills their books and critical analysis is "a slow death too" (Wilding, 2007: 95). Rather than documenting their lives, writers' papers and manuscripts deposited in a library cause "the death of the author beyond the grave" (Wilding, 2007: 95). There is a Barthesian echo of "the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin" (Barthes, 2001: 185) in Scobie's wish to destroy all his manuscripts in a bonfire.

However, instead of "enter[ing] into his own death" (Barthes, 2001: 185), urged by Claudia, Scobie goes to the other extreme and fakes his own life by doctoring the papers and manuscripts. The issue of false pretence, dissimulation and fakery is reinforced by the intertextual reference to André

Gide's *The Counterfeiters* (1925), as well as by Scobie's retreat into his newly discovered aboriginality. Ironically enough, had he managed to keep his clothes on in front of a packed room in the Sydney Opera House, this final stunt of false identity claim might have actually worked, fostered by an uneasy feeling that "the whole [Australian] culture is a fraud" (Wilding, 2007: 211).

The idea that Australians live and have always lived in a fake culture and the question of Australian hoaxery have had a haunting presence in Australian literature, with a relatively recent outstanding example of the twice Booker Prize winning author Peter Carey. His *My Life as a Fake* (2003) "scrutinizes the ideas of fakery and unoriginality within a specifically Australian context. One way to read this novel is as an inquest into, and a condemnation of, Australia's particular susceptibility to hoaxing and fakery. It is a susceptibility [...] which stems from Australian culture's desperation to be recognized as a producer of authentic literature and not just as its consumer" (Macfarlane, 2005: 340).

*National Treasure* and *My Life as a Fake* share an interest in literary (in)authenticity and (un)originality with a specifically postmodernist interpretation of the text as an inevitable permutation and recombination of pre-existing elements, "a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture" (Barthes, 2001: 188). The notion of a composite nature, yet unified consciousness of literary works is enhanced in both novels by references to stories of monstrous creatures and their makers. Carey takes the epigraph for his novel from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Wilding has Scobie compare his work with that of H. G. Wells' Doctor Moreau. The 'creature' made by writers is a tissue of words taken from a ready-made dictionary and found as component parts of other writers' 'creatures.' The writer, therefore, is forever walking a tightrope between 'making' and 'faking.'

### 3. Conclusion

Scobie speaks deridingly about the postmodernist habit of reshuffling, rewriting and revising, so that in the end he refuses to use words altogether and is consequently knocked off the board. After decades in the game, this Artful Dodger has run out of resourceful tricks or simply stopped playing by Fagin's rules. He will not be missed, since plans for his replacement have already been devised. After we have read the novel where the 'national

treasure' is presented as a toothless, dishevelled man pumped with drugs, after we have had a glimpse of the world where 'writer is a wolf to writer,' after we have witnessed the profanation of literary art, and after we have learned that art is no longer about freedom, beauty and truth but about money, power and control, it does not come as a surprise that a novel about the literary world should start with an ordered beating up and end with a hired gun collecting his cheque.

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# TO BE A NOBEL LAUREATE: J. M. COETZEE

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**Abstract:** *The South African writer, J. M. Coetzee, achieved prominence in the 1980s, in a climate of political emergency in his own country. He was both attacked as politically evasive and praised as an artist of integrity. I speculate on his being awarded the 2003 Nobel Prize in Literature.*

**Keywords:** *Art, Coetzee, Nobel Prize, politics*

## 1. Introduction

To win the Nobel Prize in literature — indeed, in any field — signals a pinnacle of achievement. In 2003, when J.M. Coetzee won the Nobel prize, he was the second South African to be so honoured, the first being the 1991 laureate, Nadine Gordimer. President Thabo Mbeki duly congratulated Coetzee. Yet, shortly before his being awarded the prize, Coetzee's novel *Disgrace* (1999) had been castigated in a government submission to the South African Human Rights Commission as symptomatic of white Afro-pessimism. The bleak vision of post-apartheid South Africa, in which the protagonist's daughter is raped by a gang of African youths, irritated the ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC).

Was Coetzee implying what the government believes many non-African South Africans (that is, whites, Indians and coloureds, or mixed-race people) believe: that any African government is inevitably doomed to fail? Soon afterwards — his plans, no doubt, predated the submission — Coetzee relocated to Australia. In comparison to the understated tenor of his novels penned 'down under', *Disgrace* — despite its international clamour — does suggest a dead end for Coetzee in his home country. Perhaps a dead end for many of us who have to find sustenance in the so-called new South Africa, in which constitutional democracy exists alongside poverty, high levels of illiteracy, an HIV pandemic, and violent crime including almost daily reports of the abuse and rape of women. Like Brazil, South

Africa is a racially and culturally heterogeneous society of vast economic and educational disparities.

Why was Coetzee awarded the Nobel prize? What has been the consequence of the award? I pose these questions in relation to Coetzee's reception as an artist who, for his entire career up to his Nobel recognition, had inhabited a politically troubled terrain. Has such a terrain been conducive to Coetzee's art?

## 2. Uncompromising insights

It was in the apartheid world of South Africa that Coetzee came to prominence. His novels, since *Dusklands* (1974), have cast a mordant eye on the collusions of colonialism and Western culture, according to which the narrative of the Enlightenment translated itself, in the third world, into new forms of imperialism, more latterly globalism: that through superior technology and economics the West, or should we now say the North, is likely to continue to impose the will of the metropolitan centre on the post-colonial periphery. Despite his suspicion of Western totalism, however, Coetzee does not offer romantic alternatives about, say, the self-preservation of indigenous cultures.

There is no escape in Africa from materialism, rationalism, global economics, the profit motive, and the cult of the individual. Offering his initial insights into the politicised climate of the 1970s and 80s, Coetzee pursued not the realist representational mode of Nadine Gordimer, whose big novels (for example, *Burger's Daughter*, 1979) addressed the then national question of apartheid. Instead, he proceeded by modernist/postmodernist fictive narratives, in which changes of perception are inextricably bound to changes in our linguistic and symbolic construction of the world.

Accordingly, his third novel, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) — his first to gain wide attention — utilises an allegorical parallel to the trauma of South Africa's disintegrating state. Just as the white Afrikaner government needed scapegoats (communists; more generally, the black Other) to sanction its oppression, so the unnamed empire of Coetzee's novel echoes C. P. Cavafy's (1971: 28) poem of psychological and historical recurrence, his 'Waiting for the Barbarians': first, construct the barbarian, then apply the rack or, in the latest empire's torture repertoire, water boarding. *Waiting for the Barbarians* — as is characteristic of Coetzee's fiction — resonates

beyond South Africa. “There are but a handful of stories in the world” (2003: 60), he said in ‘He and His Man’, his reworking of the Defoe/Crusoe relationship between author and character; his reworking, also, of the conventional Nobel Prize acceptance speech.

Reworkings of anticipated modes also occur in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. The novel alludes to the humanist tradition: see through the mystification of constructed barbarians, and recast the Other as the Same (that is, as one of us in the human community, one of us in the human condition). Simultaneously, the novel resists turning the Other into a Same. The Magistrate, who wants sex with the barbarian girl, has to learn instead to seek reciprocity even as he knows that his giving must exceed what he can expect in return. Or, as the Nobel press release has it:

His characters stand behind themselves, motionless, incapable of taking part in their own actions. But passivity is not merely the dark haze that devours personality; it is also the last resort open to human beings as they defy an oppressive order by rendering them inaccessible to its intentions. It is by exploring weakness and defeat that Coetzee captures the divine spark in man (Press Statement: J. M. Coetzee, 2003).

We, the critics, may wish to participate in the spirit of this high-flown citation. Coetzee, for his part, is more uncompromising. There are no divine sparks: David Lurie, the protagonist of *Disgrace*, refuses to apologise for his ‘disgrace’ (of sexually imposing himself on one of his — coloured — students). Lurie is a latter-day colonial interloper for whom Africa remains a kind of hunting ground. But in post-apartheid South Africa, his refusal to say he is sorry leads to his losing his university post. He eventually seeks some sort of redemption in the ‘grace’ of caring for the carcasses of stray dogs destined for the incinerator.

Coetzee’s art is minimalist. Despite the Nobel identification of his capturing the “divine spark in man”, there are not only men, but also women in his fiction. There is the flickering spark of Mrs Curren, the retired classics teacher in *Age of Iron* (1990). Amid the death throes of apartheid, when the ‘epic’ time of resistance called for heroism, Mrs Curren dares simply to seek goodness. Here Coetzee confounds expectations: the metafictional artist of his previous novel *Foe* (1986), a re-writing of *Robinson Crusoe*, offers in *Age of Iron* a deeply human meditation on aging and dying, on the value of the sympathetic individual in the iron times of history.

As the Nobel press release accurately notes, “no two books ever follow the same recipe”. The statement goes on to raise an important point in its attempt to summarise the achievement: “is it possible to evade history?” The answer is, no. But it is a complex issue. Since his first novel in the 1970s, Coetzee has been caught up in a war of critical (or, behind critical, ideological) reception. The dichotomy in those ‘iron times’ was: Coetzee’s fictive style evades political necessity; Coetzee’s fictive style complicates political necessity. The former is based on a mimetic aesthetic (life is out there); the latter on a textual aesthetic (life is created in language). Such bold conceptualisations of reference and fictionalisation set up a straw opposition. Both reference and fictionalisation in the realm of the novel are rhetorical conventions.

Nevertheless, Coetzee was accused by Marxist-sympathetic critics of being politically evasive, while he was praised by postmodern-sympathetic critics for avoiding reductive politics in more complex ethical chartings. Here is Attwell’s defence in which he endorses Adorno (1980) on art (works of art point to a practice from which they abstain: the creation of a just life): “Coetzee’s art points to a practice from which it abstains — the creation of the just life. He anticipates ethical reciprocity at some yet to be imagined historical moment when the society, no longer constrained by fierce political contest, may again allow for the possibility of judgement” (1998: 167). Or, to turn to the Nobel press statement again: “Coetzee’s intellectual honesty erodes all basis of consolation and distances itself from the tawdry drama of remorse and confession.” The achievement of the novels — we are to understand — is intellectual honesty in “well-crafted composition, pregnant dialogue, and analytical brilliance” (2003).

When Nadine Gordimer won the prize in 1991 — a year after Nelson Mandela’s release from political incarceration — she was firmly placed by the press citation in a specific context: “the consequences of apartheid form the central theme”; “hers was the involvement in free-speech in a police state”; “her literary works, in giving profound insights into the historical process, help shape this process” (Press Statement: Nadine Gordimer, 1991). It is an achievement summed up in the titles of two critical studies of Gordimer’s fiction (see Clingman, 1986; Dimitriu, 2000).

### **3. A writer of the world**

The context of Coetzee’s recognition is less tangible. Perhaps it was that by 2003 the melodramatic politics of the 1980s, whether in South Africa



(the collapse of apartheid) or in the then Soviet bloc (the collapse of the Berlin Wall) had given way to more nuanced challenges: global flows; the long, indirect reaches of power; the mystification of the end of history; the doublespeak of multiculturalism, in which the more you are encouraged to be different the more you are the same; the rise of religious fundamentalism. In systems that mask their leverage in commodity-speak (get connected) there remain vulnerable individuals.

A decade earlier Gordimer could be dubbed the voice of conscience against apartheid; a speaker from the public platform against forms of censorship. Coetzee, in contrast, is reclusive; he avoids the platform. He is a writer of solitude whose protagonists derive strength, or at least the will to endure, by being stripped of their dignity. The artist is once again accorded recognition as a lone voice, as a goad to the collective drive in its various societal manifestations. As Europe faces its new insecurities of the collective — the guest worker as permanent, alien presence, for example, or the threat of urban terror — art that “supplements” history is discarded for an art that ‘rivals’ history. The distinction is Coetzee’s (1988: 2): in the culture wars of the 1980s in South Africa — realistic versus symbolic representation; political responsibility, political irresponsibility — he defended by implication his own novelistic practice.

He need not have felt the need to defend himself for, despite his detractors, Coetzee enjoyed acclaim almost immediately. In his own country he was, for many literary-academics and newspaper critics, an antidote to the politicisation of literature. (The literary-critical scene in South Africa remains to this day overwhelmingly white, with a ‘colonial’ desire to be abreast of the latest art or critical trends abroad.) In the light of this, Coetzee’s work has spawned an immense critical output. Firstly, he satisfies the teacher in the lecture or seminar, where the allusiveness of his novels is ideally suited to close reading: in *Disgrace*, how reliable is Lurie’s free, indirect narration? Should we read the rape of his daughter, Lucy, realistically or symbolically? And so on. Secondly, the ideas embedded in his fiction have provoked a theoretically based criticism, in which the concepts of continental philosophers such as Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, and Levinas have been brought to bear on his work.

We have recurrent debate as to the relationship of ethical responsibility to Coetzee’s reluctance to transform the Other into the Same, the Other and the Same being Levinas’s ethical theorisation. As Levinas (1981) has it,

it is the radical otherness of the Other that renders the apparently autonomous subject responsible for that otherness. In South Africa, in which otherness was almost a synonym for apartheid, the Levinas-type defence of Coetzee not only misreads the author's difficulties of finding reciprocity, but also plays into the hands of those critics who are hostile towards Coetzee's politics. As Gordimer (1984: 1-6) put it in the heat of emergency times, does the passivity of the coloured protagonist, Michael K., suggest that Coetzee denied the will of black South Africans to resist evil? (Gordimer was reviewing the novel, *Life & Times of Michael K.*)

Yet, if the philosophically-based criticism of the 1990s severs the thing (the Coetzee novel) from the critical word (terms such as alterity, liminal, and diasporic abound), then Coetzee's novels themselves retain a finely judged concreteness of expression. To some, Michael K. may be a Derridean trace, a signifier only arbitrarily related to a signified, but to the less academically-inclined critic the novel tells forcefully the story of the single, vulnerable being in the time of the collective demand. As I have said, Coetzee is not a regional writer: whatever the particularity, his novels resonate in the world.

The downside is noted: Coetzee — one critic observes (Bethlehem, 2000: 153) — “has been so thoroughly domesticated by international criticism that he functions, virtually by default, as a convenient point of reference through which to hone by-now predictable aspects of postcolonial theory in its metropolitan guises” (that is, the empire's writing back to the centre). The upside is Nobel recognition. If the Classic — according to Coetzee (1993) — is best defined not by any essence or value in itself, but in its continual interrogation and re-interrogation by criticism, no matter how hostile, then by 2003 Coetzee himself had achieved something of Classic status.

#### **4. Consequences of a Nobel Prize**

What has been the consequence of his winning the Nobel prize, besides the promotional and publicity aspects, including sales and translations of his work? Let us look first at Gordimer's trajectory since her 1991 prize. She has published five novels, the first of which was probably penned in draft prior to the release of Mandela. *My Son's Story* (1990) — a strange amalgam of Shakespearean allusion, a dependent son, and a mother who

without adequate motivation in the text turns to revolution — was followed by the powerful *None to Accompany Me* (1994), in which the female protagonist in casting off the shackles of the white liberal (the suburban wife and NGO sympathiser) is determined to forge her new identity in the new South Africa. Here the personal begins to overshadow the political, as is the case in the subsequent novels.

What we might call Gordimer's 'art of necessity', however, has been diluted in *The House Gun* (1998) — a white suburban crime/homosexual melodrama of ill-adjusted youth, in *The Pickup* (2001) — a venture into post-colonial themes of migrancy and multiculturalism — and in *Get a Life* (2005), a nod to eco-issues, but in which a middle-class marital affair is the spur to the most engaging scenes. In the collection of stories *Loot* (2003), experimental styles, variegated settings, and spiritual intimations signal a move from the region to the world; local and global dimensions interact in vivid experiment. But in her latest short-story collection, *Beethoven Was One Sixteenth Black* (2007), Gordimer's home country features only in ironic asides.

In all of this there is value, but also loss. Having tied her colours firmly to the liberation banner of the African National Congress, Gordimer has found it difficult — now that the ANC as the ruling party is losing its aura — to focus on the preoccupations of contemporary South Africa. This is not to say that the artist must be committed to the localised scene; it has been Gordimer's strength, however, to derive her subject-matter initially from specifics which then rebound beyond her particular, observing eye. It is the journalist, Jonny Steinberg, who in his book, *Three-Letter Plague* (2008), has given us, via his dialogue with a real-life character, a compelling human story on the catastrophe of AIDS, a catastrophe damagingly politicised in the denialism of senior ANC figures. Such a massive subject cried out for Gordimer's literary intervention. But in her silence on contentious sociopolitical issues since the coming to power of the ANC, she has been accused, at least by one critic (Auga, 2003: 16), of having become a silent "praise singer" of the new government.

Coetzee could never be so accused. Yet, despite the vocabulary of continental philosophy imposed upon his work, despite his world recognition, Coetzee, like Gordimer, found his strength in the temper of the troubled society. Even his novels that do not ostensibly focus on the South African locality, or on metropolitan/colonial power relations, are contaminated by a

dark history: in *The Master of Petersburg* (1994) it is the question of when the society, no longer bludgeoned in its conscience by revolutionary enthusiasm, may regain its capacity for ethical discrimination. In the 'Lessons' of *Elizabeth Costello* (2003) the graphic stories of maiming and torture, as heard at South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, act almost as a palimpsest, at least for the South African reader, of Coetzee's dramatised debates on suffering and redemption, and on the writer's responsibility towards representations of good and evil.

In contrast, the 'Australian' novels, *Slow Man* (2005) and *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007), have closed the door to the torture chamber. Issues concerning the difficulty of human reciprocity, the relationship between the public and the personal life, and the challenge as to what in art constitutes the ethical vision are conveyed in the quieter rhythms of a suburban setting. The understated humour of *Slow Man* is new in Coetzee's oeuvre. So is the self-deprecatory tone of *Diary of a Bad Year*, in which the author makes little attempt to hide behind his character, who is mistakenly referred to as Señor C by the other (not the Levinas Other, but an other with a small o), the Philippine-Australian Anya, whose shapely behind fascinates the aging author, an author who disarmingly shares with his readers his own doubts about his talents as a writer fictions:

During the years I spent as a professor of literature, conducting young people on tours of books that would always mean more to me than to them, I would cheer myself up by telling myself that at heart I was not a teacher but a novelist. And indeed, it was as a novelist rather than a teacher that I won a modest reputation. But now the critics voice a new refrain. At heart he is not a novelist after all, they say, but a pedant who dabbles in fiction. And I have reached a stage in my life when I begin to wonder whether they are not right — whether, all the time I thought I was going about in disguise, I was in fact naked (2007: 191).

Is this a wry confirmation of a recurrent probing in *Elizabeth Costello*: that the post-romantic, postmodern (post/modernist) 21<sup>st</sup>-century author has no authority to teach us the 'truth'? The structure of *Diary of a Bad Year* suggests, instead, that public and private worlds have to co-exist, uneasily, and that, in consequence, the fictional work is not to be revered as an icon (the status granted by many critics to Coetzee's own work), but as a humbler, more honest — it is hoped, valuable — provocation to our better thoughts. However, the two latest 'Australian' novels do not — as do the

South African novels — depict traumatised lives; the novels almost undermine the register of the Nobel press citation. There are several ruthless judgements by Coetzee on contemporary world affairs (e.g. the long reach of US foreign adventurism); the characters, however, are not — to quote from the press citation — “overwhelmed by the urge to sink while paradoxically deriving strength from being stripped of all external dignity”.

## 5 Conclusion

One might say that Coetzee has gone beyond *Disgrace*. Whether his reputation as a Nobel prizewinner will continue to be consolidated is difficult to say. Each new novel up to now has been a surprise. The question is: do some artists, despite art/politics polemics, actually sharpen their pens in the cut and thrust of troubled times? Just as Gordimer did, so, in his own way, did Coetzee. This raises a further question: without the troubled times, would either Gordimer or Coetzee have been honoured with a Nobel prize? The statutes of the Nobel Foundation make it clear that the criterion is not an author’s attitude to life or subscription to any cause, but literary merit. Nonetheless, it would be naive to expect extra-literary considerations to have no influence upon an international literary prize.

As Espmark (1999: 9) reminds us, it was not Günter Grass — regarded at the time as Germany’s foremost representative of an artistic renewal — who in 1972 won the award, but his fellow countryman, Heinrich Böll. Describing Böll’s contribution as a “renewal of German literature”, the chairman of the Nobel Committee, Karl-Ragnar Gierow, made it clear that the term “renewal” did not refer to an experiment with form, but to a “rebirth out of [Nazi] annihilation”. In this case, weight was granted not so much to the statutes of the Nobel Foundation, in which literature is defined as “writings which, by virtue of their form and style, have literary value”, as to a phrase in Alfred Nobel’s will that over the years has led to disputes of interpretation: “the most outstanding work in an ideal direction.” Böll’s work — Gierow concluded — signalled a “moral rebirth” from the ruins of the Third Reich; it was the kind of work Alfred Nobel “wished his prize to reward” (qtd. from Espmark, 1999: 1-10).

To return to my question: without the troubled times would either Gordimer or Coetzee have been honoured with a Nobel prize? We cannot tell, and to be endlessly sceptical is to have no opportunity of human flour-

ishing. Just as Anya's words end *Diary of a Bad Year*, let her words end this paper:

Good night, Señor C, I will whisper in his ear: sweet dreams, and flights of angels, and all the rest (2007: 227).

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# IN AND OUT OF TIME: (RE) CONSTRUCTING HISTORY IN *THE SATANIC VERSES* AND *GRAVITY'S RAINBOW*

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**Abstract:** *'A loud cry crossed the night' — 'A screaming comes across the sky': Rushdie advises on moving back in time and recuperating the past to be alive again, gravitating towards reality in order to redefine oneself, whereas Pynchon lucidly witnesses no consciousness of any time, gravitating against reality with the promise of constructing oneself.*

**Keywords:** *artificial, entropy, history, identity, natural.*

## 1. Introduction

*The Satanic Verses* and *Gravity's Rainbow* address identity issues as integrated within the frame of history: while in the former novel the individual, Saladin Chamcha, succeeds in appropriating his time and thus defining his own self, in the latter, despite efforts of integrating time, Tyrone Slothrop fails to shape himself as a meaningful identity, being doomed from the very beginning by a paranoid history.

## 2. Types of history in Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*

Surpassing biased interpretations, *The Satanic Verses* stands as a novel about the route to identity, about the self working its definition in relation with the others and with the history it inhabits. It is a novel about the frustrations of falsity and the illumination of understanding, about acknowledging oneself as human and, therefore, authentic. Making sense of one's own existence necessarily and naturally leads to understanding and constructing a meaningful history. This thesis will be defended by following one of the main characters, Saladin Chamcha, and his relation to history throughout the novel.

### **2.1. History as *artificial process* versus history as *natural process***

We have differentiated between two types of history that impact upon Saladin Chamcha's works of deconstructing and, subsequently, reconstructing his identity: *history as an artificial process* and *history as a natural process*. In terms of *history as an artificial process*, Saladin Chamcha attends to the conflict between what is happening at the level of appearance and what, in fact, reality stands for. The outcome is the realization that the approach to history which the character initiates is an outstandingly forced one, therefore artificial and unproductive.

#### **2.1.1 History as blind refusal**

At the surface level, we deal initially with *history as blind refusal*. Saladin Chamcha stands for the prototype of the immigrant: he estranges himself from his past, dynamites his identity and, artificially, starts building a new one by assimilating the coordinates of the 'other'. He denies his Indian history out of preconception: it is the blunt refusal of a system of values which insinuates on him. It is an insistent refusal to understand what he denies, to comprehend his past, while continuing to use this determination in a perfectly similar approach. History at this stage represents Saladin Chamcha's entire effort to avoid succumbing to the natural course of tradition, to assume continuity with the values of family and his country. Home means the unfamiliar, the unnatural, Saladin Chamcha reorienting himself towards the "(...) Proper London in the fabled country of Vilayet across the black water and far away" (Rushdie, 2006: 35).

#### **2.1.2 History as blind acceptance**

Secondly, *history as blind acceptance or mimesis* defines Saladin Chamcha's course of action when, out of the same preconception that made him act against India, he acknowledges England. His 'personality' has no foundation: no personal convictions, no assumed beliefs, no coordinating values. His self-declared spiritual emptiness takes the shape of the environment which he perceives as authentic, namely London. Saladin Chamcha starts a migrant's process of becoming and the first results are the masks borrowed from those whom he admires unconditionally. He speaks like the English, behaves like them, his whole life patterns similarly.

A man who sets out to make himself up is taking on the Creator's role (...).  
(...) most migrants learn, and can become disguises. Our own false descrip-

tions to counter the falsehoods invented about us, concealing for reasons of security our secret selves (Rushdie, 2006: 49).

### **2.1.3 History as in-between-ness**

However, reality means *history as in-between-ness*. The realm of everything he was supposed to be, of his Indian history, will not be replaced by a different organizing value or by the elements that he tries to imitate, but rather by his connecting through fury the two worlds: the rejected one and the dreamt one. "(...) he felt the birth of that implacable rage which would burn within him, undiminished, for over a quarter of a century; which would boil away his childhood father-worship and make him a secular man (...)" (Rushdie, 2006: 43).

### **2.1.4 History as failed transplant**

His metamorphosis cannot be complete, the Indian subconsciousness springing back at key moments and proving its inextricable existence. Thus, history may equally be perceived as a *failed transplant*. The character's newly constructed, self-imposed identity battles continuously against his old national and familial values, which he runs away from, constantly trying to suppress. Beyond the appearance of success and the accomplishment of a true life, Saladin Chamcha remains aware of the reality of nothingness or of his Indian identity. Back to India, he curses it and promises that it will not catch him again. Elsewhere he defines India as "masks beneath masks until suddenly the bare bloodless skull" (Rushdie, 2006: 34).

### **2.1.5 History as exile**

Another stance of reality is *history as exile*. Saladin Chamcha blames his father for all his unfulfilled promises, for the exile he was propelled to, and, last but not least, for transforming him into someone he would not otherwise have become. He was the father who had promised the magic lamp and then took it back. The protagonist blames his father for his own, failed, existential trajectory which has developed under the sign of promise and dream and which is, in fact, nothing but a sum of empty spaces, a gathering of borrowed images that cannot be appropriated.

### 2.1.6 History as acknowledgement

In order to balance appearance and reality, Saladin Chamcha claims *history as acknowledgement from the others*: “A man who invents himself needs someone to believe in him, to prove he’s managed it. (...) Not only the need to be believed in, but to believe in another. You’ve got it: Love” (Rushdie, 2006: 49). Asserting oneself as an individual is a relational process: one’s time and space must be connected with the others’ coordinates, they are not isolated categories. Asserting identity becomes a socio-political issue in Saladin Chamcha’s situation: he starts his self-defining process from the necessity of the other’s presence (the other being represented by Pamela Lovelace, his wife, and the whole English nation). He wants both personal and social acknowledgement — from his wife and in his job.

In order to achieve this, Saladin Chamcha does not come up with his offer, but with the others’ vocabularies, showing how perfectly well he has managed to take them in. In his relationship with Pamela, Saladin Chamcha will strive to embody the English ideal of behaviour and interests, offering her a whole arsenal of cultural, if not sentimental, clichés. As an actor, he will be the performer of the thousand voices, adapting to each and every reality around him. As Moslund states, “Saladin Chamcha succeeds in inscribing himself within the new time and space, yet not as an individual, as authenticity, but as an excellent adaptable” (2006: 295).

### 2.1.7 History as frustration

The expected consequence is that of not being recognized, which triggers his perception of *history as frustration, rage and despair*. Saladin Chamcha’s landing after the explosion of *Bustan*, the plane flying from India, starts the process of his physical and symbolic transformation. He becomes the embodiment of Shaitan, the devil, a genuine goat-man. His whole previously acquired English identity starts to crack until full explosion, despite his constant self-assurance that he is a true Englishman. The English values that he has fiercely fought for and which he has assumed together with his new identity (rationality, sociability, proper emotional life), all well defined and organized, start to unveil their artificial character, thus proving that they were not personally, internally acquired, but simply claimed as proper.

Physically and metaphysically, Saladin Chamcha transforms into the Devil, Shaitan, the Absolute Other — the one who left India and tried to bury his identity without knowing it, the one who tried to copy England without knowing it at all. A stranger to England, a stranger to India, a stranger to himself, Saladin Chamcha is the embodiment of Shaitan, who terrifies not because of his monstrous physical appearance, but because of his despair and rage of not being acknowledged as a distinct identity. The drama that Saladin Chamcha experiences is that of the migrant, of the foreigner who feels the alienation despite his efforts of belonging both to himself and to the world which he considers most appropriate, namely England.

The rage and the dilemma that Saladin Chamcha experiences result from the conflict between his desperately assumed identity, his desire to conquer Englishness — “Assiduity, fastidiousness, moderation, restraint, self-reliance, probity, family life: what did these add up to if not a moral code?” (Rushdie, 2006: 257) — and his initial nature which, repressed without being understood, recurs obsessively, in the guise that Saladin Chamcha himself projected: his Indian self is the evil, the sin. Rejected by the world that he had assiduously courted, Saladin Chamcha does not understand that reality and identity are not games of interchangeable masks. At the same time, he cannot surpass his own projection of an idyllic England, unique space of worthy moral values.

Distancing himself from the former issue of Saladin Chamcha’s involvement with the others (wherein he is indicated as the perfect example of the frustrated migrant, involved in the standardized postcolonial process of self-definition), Rushdie switches to a different register, the personal one. Although it may appear as a secondary level, this is where Rushdie steps beyond the ‘multiple voices’ of any postmodernism, and returns to the humanistic values of all times.

### **2.1.8 History as personal becoming**

*History as natural and personal becoming* represents the alternative to the previous conception of history, *history as artificial*. Saladin Chamcha has landed on the English seashore together with another Indian, Gibreel Farishta, a Bollywood superstar. After some time spent in the house of Rosa Diamond, the owner of a castle on the shore, the police comes to arrest them: whereas Gibreel is considered one of them, an Englishman, Saladin Chamcha is declared to be different, the *other* and thus arrested — based

on his appearance. Gibreel's keeping silent defines what is most dramatic so far: another human being's betrayal, his own blood's betrayal, activating the fury which makes Saladin Chamcha take revenge.

His reprisal turns personal as well, consisting in making Gibreel jealous of Alleluia Cone, the one he loves. Pouring poisonous words — called *Satanic verses* — into Gibreel's ears, Saladin Chamcha succeeds in making the former kill Alleluia and then commit suicide. In the chapter 'The Angel Azraeel', the narrator turns first person and starts wondering:

Is Saladin Chamcha a creature of *selected* discontinuities, a *willing re-invention*; his preferred revolt against history being what makes him, in our chosen idiom, 'false'? And might we then not go on to say that it is this falsity of self that makes possible in Chamcha a worse and deeper falsity — call this 'evil' — and that this is the truth, the door, that was opened in him by his fall? (Rushdie, 2006: 427)

In other words, is Saladin Chamcha the embodiment of evil because he wants something different from what he was given initially? Is change in the natural course of things to be blamed as malefic and leading to destruction, in total opposition to the naturalness and good of continuity, of developing within a given register, as it happens with Gibreel? Operating with dichotomies in making value judgments and establishing values in general should not be enough. Defining evil cannot be performed by applying patterns. Evil is not a patterned category. Evil is not change, just as good is not constant.

Let's rather say an even harder thing: that evil may not be as far beneath our surfaces as we like to say it is. — That, in fact, we fall towards it naturally, that is, not against our natures. — And that Saladin Chamcha set out to destroy Gibreel Farishta because, finally, it proved so easy to do; the true appeal of evil being the seductive ease with which one may embark upon the road (and, let us add in conclusion, the later impossibility of return) (Rushdie, 2006: 427).

Saladin Chamcha is not 'Evil' because he leaves India and assumes a new identity, the *Civis Britannicus*. The evil must not be sought in the open trajectory of his becoming, of his transformation, an ample project which can invite to the prejudices of the immigrant — native, other — same discourse. The evil in Saladin Chamcha is not the great evil, but the minor, mean one, springing from abject revenge, by means of an inferior, truly

human, register. The most dangerous evil, Rushdie warns, is the evil as human, natural tendency. History is the sum of the small, personal evils that might degenerate without any logic.

Saladin Chamcha moves from human to humane because he feels responsible for the personal injustice and evil that he has committed. Saved from death by Gibreel, at the Shaandaar Café, Saladin Chamcha later realizes his own evil. This is the moment when he starts acquiring values: his own, not the ones he has been trying to mimic. This is where his own history starts: history as acknowledgement, history as personal insight, as natural process, is the variant Rushdie finally opts for.

Back in India, Saladin Chamcha is offered by his dying father the long promised “magic lamp”. Tradition, India, family: everything is offered back to him. Is Saladin Chamcha eager to accept all that as his as well? Is this the moment he has been waiting for? The answer, surprisingly or not, is negative. His father’s magic lamp has proved to be no better than England’s values: both — imposed identities, both — strange histories, nothing but fairy-tales.

[He] could no longer believe in fairy-tales. Childhood was over, and the view from his window was no more than an old and sentimental echo. To the devil with it! Let the bulldozers come. If the old refused to die, the new could not be born.

‘Come along,’ Zeenat Vakil’s voice said at his shoulder. (...)

‘I’m coming,’ he answered her, and turned away from the view (Rushdie, 2006: 547).

What is offensive in *The Satanic Verses* then? Mahound, the prophet, a character in Rushdie’s novel, is required to establish the position of three goddesses, the daughters of Shaitan. The first revelation is that:

‘[Lat, Uzza and Manat] they are the exalted birds, and their intercession is desired indeed’ (Rushdie, 2006: 114),

consequently asserting polytheism. Shortly after, he abjures:

‘Shall He have daughters and you sons?’ Mahound recites. ‘That would be a fine division!

‘These are but names you have dreamed of, you and your fathers. Allah vests no authority in them’ (Rushdie, 2006: 124).

Polytheism turns monotheistic. Both sets of verses are revealed, and this is not the result of Mahound's inner convictions. Is this the offense against Islam? I dare say no. The offense lies in the way in which truth grows to be established: externally, from outside one's judgment, not internally, as a result of one's process of reasoning and reflection. This is the overall effect of following Saladin Chamcha's evolution as well: only after personally establishing values will he eventually make sense both of himself and of his history, successfully inscribing himself within his proper time.

### **3. *Gravity's Rainbow*: Either Chaos or Chaos**

The concepts tackled by Pynchon in *Gravity's Rainbow* are mainly those of coherence versus incoherence, unity versus division, identity versus difference. Equally significant is the novelist's concern with history, with the debatable relation between real historical data and parodic historical constructs. The events referred to evolve within a chaotic world, governed by the probable and the incredible, which lacks overall signification. The historical content may be inspired from documents, but their potential, coherent meaning is the debatable function of a consciousness that struggles to achieve its own unity in relational acts of synthesizing. However, what it finally accomplishes is solely to negate its unity and its relations, wasting itself in the diffuse projections of its own self.

#### **3.1 Entropy and Puritanism**

Applying the concept of thermodynamic entropy has the role of illustrating the tendency towards cultural uniformity. Communication is degraded, modified by the certainty or the probability of the message. The concept transposed in the novel is a metaphor for the society, a historical time characterized by social and behavioural standardizing: the American culture in which communication is diminished and meanings are characterized by routine, conformity, predictability. Applying the concept of informational entropy is justified by the modality in which messages are codified in the text, so that their uncertainty and improbability might be maintained. There is no final explanation for the generalized confusion: the hypotheses multiply as the number of revelations and suggestions grows, the consequence being a discourse that maximizes the effects of ambiguity, indetermination, and paradox (Maltby, 1991: 232).



To Puritans, sacred history represents a preordained movement towards redemption. To physicists, profane history stands for a predictable movement towards what is random. The two visions combine in the works of Thomas Pynchon, the novelist achieving an imaginative transformation of the entropic process (the way in which the two conceptions could be used to explain our present history). Pynchon's fiction concerns the way in which history and historical events can affect culture. History is not a pattern that repeats endlessly: events intentionally projected to take over the previous ones do not match the intended patterns. The outcome is that individuals increasingly alienate themselves from God and approach Apocalypse faster and faster (according to the Puritan understanding of history). Yet, despite the significant number of apocalypses, the final moment never occurs.

Both in Pynchon's and in the Puritans' view, the process is more important than the outcome. The historical process is continuous in time, directed towards redemption. According to the Puritan representation, the two types of history (profane and sacred) interact as they alternate within the time spiral. Change is thus inevitable. Pynchon initially planned his work according to the Puritan historical model but, once all ordering principles disappeared, the whole vision headed towards a disorderly movement. Thus, the direction is no longer given by redemption, the accidental being the force that governs the evolution of events.

The sacred is replaced by the profane, the religious vision of history turns into an entropic one. The lack of meaning defines the nature of all searches, of love and life, being a constant feature of Pynchon's characters. The entropic theory of history also involves removing God from the world, depersonalizing the idea of beginning/end, the focus lying on the process that unfolds in between the two. Both for Pynchon (entropic history heads for an unstructured, arbitrary ending, the moments of order representing a mere passage) and for the Puritans (history progresses to a structured ending, any moment of disorder being a temporary aberration), humanity finds itself in a process of development. To Pynchon, progress towards order equals regress into chaos. The writer suggests a synthesis of Puritan redemption and the entropic accidental into a new historical theory, as elaborated and applied in *Gravity's Rainbow*: our history simultaneously heads for a structured ending and a disordered one (Olster, 1989: 201).

### 3.2 “The paranoid style”

Pynchon’s novels confront one with various degrees of paranoia, starting from personal (Oedipa, Stencil) and reaching cosmic ones (Tyrone Slothrop), displaying what Hofstadter calls the “paranoid style”:

The distinguishing thing about the paranoid style is not that its exponents see conspiracies or plots here and there in history, but that they regard a ‘vast’ or ‘gigantic’ conspiracy as the motive force in historical events. History is a conspiracy, set in motion by demonic forces of almost transcendent power... The paranoid spokesman sees the fate of this conspiracy in apocalyptic terms — he traffics in the birth and death of whole worlds, whole political orders, and whole systems of human values (1965: 29).

Puritanism — or at least the Puritan expectations that compensate the lack of a Puritan God by paranoia — can be extensively read in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. According to Scott Sanders, “paranoia is the last retreat of the Puritan imagination” (1975: 178). Like Benny Profane in Pynchon’s other novel, *V*, Tyrone Slothrop is a schlemiel, a perpetual victim of others’ plots, and, at the same time, a projector of plots himself. At every turn he is beset by suspicions which he himself describes as paranoid. For Slothrop, the world is either dominated by the arbitrary (thus totally chaotic) or, conversely, governed by hidden forces in remote control of history. As in his previous novels, *The Crying of Lot 49* and *V*, through Slothrop, Tchitcherine and Pirate Prentice Pynchon addresses the status of characters ‘held at the edge’, in a risky position, from which they must fight to grasp the order and meaning of the conspiratorial world and history they inhabit:

Those like Slothrop, with the greatest interest in discovering the truth, were thrown back on dreams, psychic flashes, omens, cryptographies, drug-epistemologies, all dancing on a ground of terror, contradiction, absurdity (Pynchon, 1973: 582).

History is perceived as a distant, confused yet authoritative order, placed beyond any palpable reach, which manifests in the guise of different forms of paranoia. Slothrop’s awareness of history is that it is either rocket-bombs falling on London with his name written on them or a Father Conspiracy holding him as the victim: “There is a villain here, serious as death. It is this typical American teenager’s own *Father*, trying episode after episode to kill his son. And the kid knows it” (Pynchon, 1973: 674).

Slothrop's perception of history is that of a well patterned universe, yet meaningless since it stands as a structure whose structuring principle is missing. Pynchon connects Slothrop's paranoia to an inherited religious cast of mind, the readers being constantly informed of his Puritan ancestry. Paranoia manifests itself in his case as the secular form of the Puritan consciousness, Slothrop being possessed by "a Puritan reflex of seeking other orders behind the visible, also known as paranoia" (Pynchon, 1973: 188).

There is always an externally given order, with manifest connections and structures. Yet, the more Slothrop struggles to determine the ordering principle, the fewer chances of success he has. He places different coordinating stances at the center, but the mere variety of his choice undermines the potential authority of any of them: industrialists, secret agents, the Father, the Rocket, a Them, an industrial cartel. The last hypostasis confers the global vision of an industrial conspiracy, Slothrop attributing in the end the entire course of twentieth century history to that cartel's workings and machinations. Enzian, another character in the novel, goes even further, asserting that the cartel itself is only a cover for a more terrifying conspiracy:

This War was never political at all, the politics was all theatre, all just to keep the people distracted... secretly, it was being dictated instead by the needs of technology... by a conspiracy between human beings and techniques (Pynchon, 1973: 521).

Sanders identifies this moment

as the metaphysical moment in Pynchon: the moment at which fears of conspiracy are projected onto the cosmos itself. Enzian suggests that the cartel is governed by the needs of technology, technology by matter. And matter, as every reader of Pynchon knows, is governed by the laws of thermodynamics, which point toward annihilation (1975: 184).

Technology, matter, death are the colours of the rainbow that Pynchon puts forth, in an acceptance of history as a distant and doomed process.

Slothrop faces the same dilemma as in the case of Oedipa Maas, where the Tristero system represented the only alternative to meaninglessness: worse than being trapped in a conspiracy which certainly leads to death is not being trapped in a conspiracy at all. The apocalyptic perspective is double: either everything is connected and triggers disappearance, or

nothing is connected and equally implies a meaningless reality. History is either wholly determined from a dead center without, or entirely absurd. The individual in search of making sense cannot authentically connect with reality or history: he is either manipulated or adrift.

Losing one's identity is the outcome of both cases that Pynchon discusses. Both being part of a plot with a missing or reified central principle and being isolated from all external patterns explode time and meanings. After adopting various identity disguises and attempting to make sense of the history he belongs to, Slothrop gives up any effort of imagining himself as a person: keeping oneself at a distance from any conspiracy means the obliteration of identity, the same way in which belonging to them involves the presence of merely chaotic glimpses of oneself.

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# THE POSTCOLONIAL VOICE OF A COLONIAL WRITER: RUDYARD KIPLING'S *KIM*

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**Abstract:** Rudyard Kipling's novel *Kim* is mainly regarded as the work of a colonizer, dealing with a traditional perception of "the Other". The present paper attempts to read Kipling's novel from a postcolonial perspective, proving that the author deals with the issue of identity in the flexible manner of the post-colonial discourse, thus transgressing the colonial view of the world.

**Keywords:** ambivalence, cultural stereotypes, hybridity, in-betweenness, mimicry.

## 1. Introduction

The present paper focuses on different approaches to Rudyard Kipling's novel *Kim*, which has mainly been regarded as the work of a colonizer, revolving around racial stereotypes and once more endowing the English with the ultimate proof of power, i.e. their cultural supremacy. Torn between the East and the West, Kipling will provide a varying range of stereotypes, which will, however, turn out to be more than simple cultural reductions. My analysis will show that there is no strict set of values in his work which should point him out as a mere radical believer. He will rather act as a mirror to the contradictions of India, a many-sided empire.

The novel gradually unfolds around Kimball O'Hara, an orphaned child in search of his identity in the Indian context. The first paragraph introduces him as a little ruler of his surroundings, rebellious and dismissive:

He sat, in defiance of municipal orders, astride the gun Zam-Zammah on her brick platform opposite the old Ajaib-Gher — the Wonder House, as the natives call the Lahore Museum. Who hold Zam-Zammah, that 'fire-breathing dragon', hold the Punjab; for the great green-bronze piece is always first of the conqueror's loot. There was some justification for Kim — he had kicked Lala Dinanath's boy off the trunnions — since the English held the Punjab and Kim was English (Kipling, 1994: 7).

The opening image is apparently very clear, as if Kipling were trying to avoid any possible misreading: “he” holds a gun, the ultimate proof of power, defying the law after he has kicked a native boy. The violence of the actions is legitimized by his being English. On the other hand, there appear the first stereotypes about the natives. They call a gun the “fire-breathing dragon” and the local museum a “Wonder house”, like “barbarians” who must translate foreign ideas/ objects into their own cultural context. Thus, the attitude of the author should be clear: the two worlds are definitely set apart and the power relations will not be reversed. Nevertheless,

Kim was English. Though he was burned black as any native; though he spoke the vernacular by preference, and his mother-tongue in a clipped uncertain singsong; though he consorted on terms of perfect equality with the small boys of the bazaar; Kim was white — a poor white of the very poorest. [...] His mother had been a nursemaid in a colonel’s family and had married Kimball O’Hara, a young colour-sergeant of the Mavericks, an Irish regiment (Kipling, 1994: 7-8).

His skin shows a different reality from the one we have just been introduced to: his complexion is dark, like any native’s. The language he uses is not, as one would be inclined to believe, his mother-tongue (thus English), which he speaks with the hesitations of a foreigner, but the “vernacular”. To Kim, the choice of the spoken language is a reality dictated by an inner voice, the one that will place him in such a variety of cultural contexts. The text shows further contradictions in Kim’s behaviour, which will define him throughout the novel: although he is said to have kicked a local boy, we learn that he is at “perfect equality with the small boys of the bazaar”. This ‘in-betweenness’ (as Homi Bhabha defines colonial identity, cf. 1994: 219) will rule over his future actions, even if at a subconscious level.

## **2. The ambivalence of the colonial discourse**

The very first page in Kipling’s novel somehow warns that we are dealing with two types of reality, that there are at least two Indias: the India of the immediate reality, where people act according to their official status, and the inner India, as perceived by the people whose ‘identity boxes’ are not very clearly shaped. This split in the inner configuration of the individual defines the ambivalence of the colonial discourse (cf. Bhabha, 1994: 86).

Yet, while most authors of the time (such as E.M. Forster in *A Passage to India*) have defined the natives exclusively by using stereotypes, Kipling allows his local characters to develop in a manner which is closer to real life. Although Kim (thus Kipling himself) does obviously not speak about a torn identity (since, at the time, there was no postcolonial theory to define it as such), the inner rupture of the individual is the novel's driving principle.

Kipling provides a very good example of indeterminacy and ambivalence, by "his inability to secure some absolute ground either for the cause of empire or for his 'best-beloved' India" (Sullivan, 1993: 3). Both himself and his entire writings were torn between the self's resistance to and its longing for the Empire. The unstable opposites home/ England/ empire and home/ India/ jungle were the ones to determine the complex attitude of "the bard of the Indian empire" (Hobsbawm, 1989: 82), as many critics have called him. However, I shall try to prove that he was more than a mere advocate of the empire and that his ambivalence was to announce the identity issues of what is now known as postcolonial reality.

In the absence of his English father, Kipling's character will choose the lama as his first guide in life. It is interesting to see how Kim comes to this option: "This man was *entirely new* to all his experience, and he meant to investigate further, precisely as he would have investigated a new building or a strange festival in Lahore city. The lama was *his trove*, and he *purposed to take possession*" (Kipling, 1994: 22, emphasis added). The people around him build a sort of anthropological experiment, an attitude typical of the European who comes to new lands. It is this curiosity and the need for possession and discovery that bring him to the relationship with the lama. Thus, we have a character who is Indian in appearance and language, but "English" in behaviour. Kim does not mind borrowing whatever suits him best from the two cultures and is at perfect ease with his double personality. He does not feel the gap between the two, as most colonial subjects do, but rather embraces this *mélange*.

The novel's plot is relatively simple: the child and the lama will pursue their own 'truths', the symbols supposed to rule their life — the Red Bull on a Green Field and the Holy River. The two wander through India, Kim becomes an agent in the Secret Service, succeeds in defeating a Russian mission and will eventually enter the British Secret Service, after being educated at an English school, financed by the lama. Yet, what appears to be a boy's adventure-story is also an intricate fantasy of idealized imperialism

and colonialism and “the friendship between Kim and the lama is Kipling’s fable of the ideal relationship between the Englishman (ever a boy at heart) and the Indian — eternally passive, unworldly and childlike” (Sullivan, 1993: 150).

### 3. Englishness and/or Indianness?

Kipling’s novel is, however, more complex than this and I believe that today’s postcolonial theories facilitate, but, at the same time, misguide the reading of his text. What most critics tend to forget is that not until long ago there was an obvious need for a precise identity and that a choice was always required: one could be either English, or Indian. Kim’s personality, however, will develop according to his own needs and his gestures will seem very natural to himself, even if they contradict the views of the two worlds he inhabits: “The woman who looked after him insisted with tears that he should wear European clothes — trousers, a shirt, and a battered hat. Kim found it easier to slip into Hindu or Muhammadan garb when engaged on certain businesses” (Kipling, 1994: 10).

His appearance will be that of a native, who drinks “native-fashion” (Kipling, 1994: 25) from a cup and, more importantly, is perceived as a native by the Europeans. Yet, strangely enough, it is the natives who expect him to have a strict behaviour: “Thou art a casteless Hindu — a bold and unblushing beggar, attached, belike, to the Holy One for the sake of gain” (Kipling, 1994: 93). The lama makes a very accurate remark when saying:

‘A sahib and the son of a sahib — ‘the lama’s voice was harsh with pain. ‘But no white man knows the land and the customs of the land as thou knowest. How comes it this true?’ ‘What matter, Holy One? — but remember it is only for a night or two. Remember, *I can change swiftly*. It will all be as it was when I first spoke to thee under Zam-Zammah the great gun-‘As a boy in the dress of white men — when I first went to the Wonder House. And a second time thou wast a Hindu. What shall the third incarnation be?’ (Kipling, 1994: 124, emphasis added).

Thus, each of the worlds he inhabits regards him as belonging to the other one: to the Indians he is, at best, a casteless Hindu or a disguised European, while to the English he is a native boy trying to deceive them by stating that he is English. As Zohreh Sullivan notes, he is both produced and



initially despised by the system (i.e. the empire), a system which “creates” cultural hybrids but cannot, afterwards, deal with their reality. In his study, *Kim and Orientalism*, Patrick Williams discusses the traditional narrative solution: the character discovers only at the end of the novel that he has parents of noble blood. In *Kim* the problem is solved by “making Kim culturally Indian and naturally British” (Williams in Williams & Chrisman eds., 1994: 493). It is this reality which governs the novel, together with the fact that “[e]veryone in *Kim* is equally an outsider to other groups and an insider in his” (Said, 1994: 187).

For Edward Said, Kim is “a character who can sportingly cross lines and invade territories, a little Friend of all the World — Kim O’Hara himself. It is as if by holding Kim at the centre of the novel [...] Kipling can have and enjoy India in a way that even imperialism never dreamed of” (1994: 188). Thus, he can pass from one dialect to another, from one set of values and beliefs to another, bearing what one will call today a ‘postmodern/colonial’ identity, the particular cultural flexibility which Homi Bhabha regards as “the truest eye upon today’s culture”. Kipling does affirm “the benefits of cultural and intellectual pluralism, asserting the right to see things from different angles” (Lycett, 1999: 451), but the novel develops in different directions, not all of them encouraging multiculturalism. A very eloquent fragment highlights Kim’s inner dilemma:

Kim rubbed his nose and grew furious, *thinking, as usual, in Hindi*. ‘This with a beggar from the bazaar might be good, but — I am a sahib and the son of a sahib and, which is twice as much more beside, a student of Nucklao. Yes’ (here *he turned to English*), ‘a boy of St Xavier’s. Damn Mr. Lungan’s eyes! — It is some sort of machinery like a sewing-machine. Oh, it is a great cheek of him — we are not frightened that way at Lucknow — No!’ *Then in Hindi*: ‘But what does he gain? He is only a trader — I am in this shop (Kipling, 1994: 201, emphasis added).

His multiple identities will lead to a crisis regarded as ‘natural’ in our cultural times. Yet, I would call it innovative for Kipling’s literary and cultural period, as it is rendered by questions [“What am I? Mussulman, Hindu, Jain, or Buddhist? That is a hard knot” (Kipling, 1994: 192)] or statements such as “No; I am Kim. This is the great world, and I am only Kim. Who is Kim?” He considered his own identity, a thing he had never done before, till his head swam. He was one insignificant person in all this roaring whirl of India, going

southward to he knew not what fate” (Kipling, 1994: 159). Kim’s position will shift throughout the novel, since he lives simultaneously inside and outside Indian culture, while his whiteness will be both confirmed and denied.

#### **4. How Whiteness enters the world**

Upon seeing him for the first time, the English men of power will have to fight stereotypes: “You see, Bennett, he’s not very black. [...] It is possible that I have done the boy an injustice. He is certainly white, though evidently neglected” (Kipling, 1994: 117-118), while a native says about Kim: “There is a white boy by the barracks waiting under a tree who is not a white boy” (Kipling, 1994: 136). His true complexion lies in the eyes of the beholder, and each individual will see in him whatever his/her own cultural context dictates him to see.

The Englishmen make an attempt to “bleach” him (as Frantz Fanon would see it — cf. 1967: 47), while the natives are mainly confused, but apparently more flexible. An ultimate contradiction will be Kim’s own perception of his identity: as the keeper of the gun and as “little Friend of all the world”, he plays two roles which are “incompatible, mutually exclusive and capture exactly the inimical dilemma of empire” (Sullivan, 1993: 151). His nickname (“Little Friend of all the World”) indicates his subconscious desire for hybridity: he feels at home in several cultures and embraces them as his own because they are all part of who he is.

At the same time, Kim will also be torn between the obsessive line “Once a sahib, always a sahib” and his sometimes rebellious nature stating “I do not want to be a sahib” (Kipling, 1994: 145). His choice will thus correspond to the first image in the book: as the emblem of British authority, he will finally choose English order over native chaos, a reason for Williams to state that Kim’s racial indefiniteness is only apparent (see Williams in Williams, Chrisman eds., 1994: 492). I strongly doubt that Kim stages his identity crises, as he does not even realize what the exact meaning of his shiftings is. The natural art by which he mingles his speech and his behaviour defines him as the precursor of the postcolonial man, whose composed identity is perceived today as natural. The problem with Kim is that ‘he knows’ that he has to choose one identity over the other, since early 20<sup>th</sup>-century India is not a time for ambivalence:

At the heart of Kim's ambivalence is a profound moment of personal and historical anguish — to be a Sahib he must allow the 'two sides' of his head to evolve and internalize the contradictions of what Bhabha calls the 'colonial moment'. One side accepts (along with the power and knowledge) the myth of Kim as beloved child of India and the other articulates difference, separation, and division from the fantasy of connection with India. It is the moment, too, of Kim's entry into the symbolic and into history as a subject, as a knowledgeable agent whose actions will turn him towards surveillance and power (Sullivan, 1994: 178).

## 5. Revisiting the Orient

The entire novel is actually a series of attempts to play one system of values against another, the East versus the West, each receiving a new polarity. In his essay, Patrick Williams mentions the position of Lord Birkenhead, the Secretary of State for India, who governed the country without actually being there but claimed that he had a 'feel' of the country due to his reading of Kipling (cf. Williams in Williams & Chrisman eds., 1994: 481). In the novel there is a similar example of a cultural stereotype: it is Europeans (Lungan, in this case) who provide Orientals with 'accurate' descriptions of Oriental religion, history, language (Williams also makes this remark, but to him the situation seems 'natural') and thus the European is revealed as an all-knowing character.

In his recent Kipling study, Andrew Lycett makes the remark that "[h]e makes no attempt to portray the colonialist's existence as superior to the native's" (Lycett, 1999: 449-450). Indeed, the stereotypes in the novel do refer to both nations, even if most critics only talk about the ones referring to Indians. The Oriental is described as follows: "He returned the money, keeping only one anna in each rupee of the price of the Umballa ticket as his commission — the immemorial commission of Asia" (Kipling, 1994: 41); "My experience is that one can never fathom the Oriental mind" (Kipling, 1994:120); "Kim would lie like an Oriental"; [...] Kim's ability to sleep as the trains roar is an instance of 'the Oriental indifference to mere noise'" (Said, 1994: 181).

The list of Oriental stereotypes could go further. Surprising is the fact that the Europeans are as 'thoroughly' analyzed as the colonial subjects, an aspect which many critics have left aside: "Only the devils and the English

walk to and fro without reason” (Kipling, 1994: 107); “I have never seen white soldiers’ ‘They do no harm except when they are drunk. Keep behind this tree’” (Kipling, 1994:109); “‘Never speak to a white man until he is fed’, said Kim, quoting a well-known proverb” (Kipling, 1994: 112); “‘The English do eternally tell the truth’, he said, ‘therefore we of this country are eternally made foolish’” (Kipling, 1994: 188); “Kim felt all the European’s lust for flesh-meat, which is not accessible in a Jain temple” (Kipling, 1994: 259).

Edward Said defends Kipling by saying that he was “a great artist in a sense blinded by his own insights about India, confusing the realities that he saw with such colour and ingenuity, with the notion that they were permanent and essential” (Said, 1994: 196). I do not mean to suggest that stereotypical images are to be highly praised. Yet, while all the writers in his time were judgmental only when it came to other nationalities, Kipling succeeded in being conscious of his own people’s faults and listed them as naturally as he did the Indian ones.

Another type of discourse is also present in *Kim*: cultural mimicry seen as a sort of “repetition” of the English, not a “re-presentation” as Bhabha (cf. 1994: 88) has very accurately defined it. The reader meets different Indians who have turned into objects of mimicry: “An increasing cackle of complaints, orders, and jests, and what to a European would have been bad language, came from behind the curtains” (Kipling, 1994: 90); “Onlee — onlee — you see, Mister O’Hara, I am unfortunately Asiatic, which is a serious detriment in some respect. And all — so I am Bengali — a fearful man [...] There is no hurry for Hurree — that is an European pun, ha! ha!” (Kipling, 1994: 297-299). A native woman declares to Kim:

I was fair once. Laughest thou? Once, long ago, a sahib looked on me with favour. Once, long ago, I wore European clothes at the mission-house yonder. [...] Once, long ago, I was Ker-lis-ti-an and spoke English — as the sahibs speak it. [*left by her sahib, who did not return from his journey as promised, she says*] Then I saw that the Gods of the Kerlistians lied, and I went back to my own people ... I have never set eyes on a sahib since” (Kipling, 1994: 349-350).

The idea of possessing another world by possessing a man is widely explained by Robert Young. On the other hand, this type of mimicry, a mere imitation, cannot determine any cultural evolution of the human being because one cannot acquire a different cultural context only by borrowing

or appropriating its ideas. This leads to the subjective view of the colonized, who perceive their new language as being the same as their native one. Yet, as she sadly admits, she has forgotten it.

Lycett believes that “affirming the benefits of cultural and intellectual pluralism, asserting the right to see things from different angles” (1999: 451) is Kipling’s view upon the new cultural realities. He was actually torn, somewhat like his character, between regarding the Indians as mimic men and perceiving them as a true and complex identity. Homi Bhabha has stated that “in the colonial discourse, that space of the other is always occupied by an *idée fixe*: despot, heathen, barbarian, chaos, violence” (1994: 101), but there is more to Kipling than being trapped in an *idée fixe*. The different characters who appear in the novel are as complex and hard to grasp as colonial India itself and one would indeed do great injustice to Kipling by calling him a mere “bard of the Empire”.

The identity discourse will govern some parts of the novel, being generated from a subconscious level. There was no vast theory at the time debating the national choices of any person. Even if there had been, a clear choice, a definite separation between longing and reality would have always been necessary. Several paragraphs raise the question of identity and reinforce the in-between-ness of the character: “So far Kim had been thinking in Hindi, but a tremor came on him, and with an effort like that of a swimmer before sharks, who hurls himself half out of the water, his mind leaped up from darkness that was swallowing it and took refuge in — the multiplication-table in English!” [... *but also*] “That night he dreamed in Hindustani, with never an English word” (Kipling, 1994: 205-206; 258).

Even if, at first, the English language seems to ‘settle in’ for good, he involuntarily dreams in Hindustani, thus rejecting any trace of his former choice. There is also another fragment, in a way anticipating the modern problem of identity as articulated by Virginia Woolf, which needs consideration:

A very few white people, but many Asiatics, can throw themselves into amazement as it were by repeating their own names over and over again to themselves, letting the mind go free upon speculation as to what is called personal identity. When one grows older, the power, usually, departs, but while it lasts it may descend upon a man at any moment (Kipling, 1994: 247-248).

These lines remind one of Louis, Virginia Woolf's character from *The Waves*, who signs his name over and over again in order to be able to visualize his own identity, to make it somewhat palatable. To Kipling, the Oriental finds himself in the same situation: he must say his name or even play with it and with the idea of identity, accurately defined as a 'speculation'. Only by growing older will he be able to 'settle down', but the risk of being unable to accept the given name (and, so, the 'given identity') will always be there. The Russians in the novel give a very accurate description of Kim's situation:

'He represents in little India in transition — the monstrous hybridism of East and West,' the Russian replied. 'It is we who can deal with Orientals.' 'He has lost his own country and has not acquired any other. But he has a most complete hatred of his conquerors' (Kipling, 1994: 318).

His identity is associated with India's: in transition, "neither/nor" — "both/end", it is an identity which requires definition or redefinition according to the cultural needs. It is strange for Kipling to use the term 'hybridism' with the same valences as those identified by postcolonial research. The difference is that, at the time, hybridity was perceived as 'monstrous' due to the *mélange* which the theory of that period regarded as abnormal. This is why Kim will finally have to choose a fixed identity in order to 'settle down'. At the end of the novel "Kim knelt over the body in the deadly fear. 'Nay', he cried passionately, 'this is only a weakness.' Then *he remembered that he was a white man*, with a white man's camp-fittings at his service" (Kipling, 1994: 325, emphasis added). His Oriental features are regarded as mere weaknesses and he has reached the moment when he *has to remember*, or, actually, *be reminded* of the fact that he is white. He himself is not yet trapped into drawer-like definitions of the self.

Edward Said makes a remark which apparently needs no further justification and can be taken as such:

For if you belong in a place, you do not have to keep saying and showing it: you just are like [...] the various Indians in *Kim*. But colonial, i.e. geographical, appropriation requires such assertive inflections, and these emphases are the hallmark of the imperial culture reconfirming itself to and for itself (Said, 1994: 194).

On the one hand one needs not justify or define oneself, because the national coordinates are clear. Yet, this is only the case of “clear” territories, wherein no “racial mixture” has taken place. In the postcolonial context, however, the identity of the individual proves to be a many-sided issue backed up by various theories. Moreover, in the postmodern context, even territories which cannot geographically be defined as former colonies find themselves in a similar situation.

Zohreh Sullivan very accurately remarks that

[T]he history of empire and of personalities produced by the empire repeats itself, [...] Kipling [constructing] a pathology of selves which illuminates the pathology of empire. Understanding Kipling’s stories requires us to reread their representations of self in terms of the culture of empire, and then again, of representations of empire in terms of the self (Sullivan, 1993: 180).

## 6. Conclusion

Rudyard Kipling’s India helped construct a mythology of imperialism by reflecting both the real and the imaginary relationship between the British and their Indian subjects. It also illustrated the desire for a union between the rulers and the ruled and the imperatives of the imposed historic separation between the two. But Kim’s final choice of joining the British Secret Service casts a new light upon the novel and its author’s own attitude: Kipling’s India was not the time of pluralism and a clear separation of cultural identities was highly required. Many ideas, particularly those of hybridity and identity seen as personal constructs, were innovative for his time, anticipating the cultural theory to follow. Tradition and modernism are the signs which govern Kipling’s novel. It depends on the reader and viewer which one shall rule.

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# THE PATCH IN THE QUILT TEXTILE METAPHORS IN ROHINTON MISTRY'S *A FINE BALANCE*

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**Abstract:** *Inspired by Barthes' idea of the text as a tissue of quotations, Mistry's novel A Fine Balance is constructed around a web of textile images meant to offer a plea for tolerance and for the rejection of dogmatism. This paper focuses upon the ways in which this novel uses the acts of tailoring and sewing in order to shape discourses and identities though the same metaphors acquire almost opposite significances when they are transported from individual to political discourses.*

**Keywords:** *balance, identity, in/tolerance, social prejudice.*

## 1. Introduction

*A Fine Balance*, Rohinton Mistry's 1995 novel, three times nominated for the Booker Prize and winner of the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best Book, was initially intended as a short story focused, as Mistry confesses in an interview (Shaikh, 2003), on the image of a woman at a sewing machine and her destiny, together with the destinies of those related to her. What was meant to offer a slice of Indian life became, in fact, a profoundly human political parable, depicting the Indian life during the Emergence period, life within and outside one's caste, life in the city and on its outskirts, life on the margins of humanity and finally, life trying to strike the right balance between survival and destruction. It deals with social and familial dramas in Indira Gandhi's India, in a very strikingly sentimental and, at the same time, painfully realistic manner.

Family ties placed in a particular social, political and historical context and the way in which they are affected by these fluctuating and highly disturbing circumstances are the main concerns of this novel. Balance becomes the key term in an unstable universe whose inhabitants are constantly striving to achieve independence. In fact, each character's life story in the novel is a different version of the same struggle — to gain personal

and financial independence, to get rid of social prejudices and do away with caste limitations. Striking the right balance is the general movement of the novel reflected in the way narration and characters are built, in the manner in which Mistry achieves the proper mixture of irony, humour and tragedy, and draws a thin line between reality, politics and history.

Mistry places his novel during the period of Emergence in India and a large part of it takes place in a city by the sea (which is never mentioned but which everybody recognises as Bombay), and in the countryside. Four characters coming from different parts of India, with different social backgrounds, educations and expectations meet and are forced to experience dramatic incidents that bring them together in a lifetime friendship. The character bringing them together is Dina Dilal, the widow, who tries to earn her living by sewing dresses and to get the financial independence that will allow her to escape her brother's 'protection'. She hires two independently working tailors, Ishvar Darji and his nephew, Omprakash Darji, who struggle to make a situation and go beyond their humble origin and their 'untouchable' condition. The fourth is Maneck Kohlah, a student coming from a picturesque village in the mountains, who rents a room in Dina's little flat. The interwoven stories of these four characters prove Rohinton Mistry's insightful social and political analyses, severely censoring Indira Gandhi's regime, and perfectly balanced character studies.

## **2. Weaving reality into stories**

Something peculiar about Mistry's novel is his treatment of textile metaphors, whose uses render politics and reality major antagonists. Everything is translated in textile and tailoring terms: identity, history, time, feelings. Textile metaphors abound and find their correspondence in an Indian reality torn between conflicting political interests and false pretensions of tolerance. The opening pages of the novel set the sombre, falsely humorously atmosphere which is going to prevail up to the end of the novel. An apparently uneventful journey by train to the city turns out a disaster when the train, carrying aboard three of the major characters in the novel, runs over a person committing suicide. The opening episode will initiate the perfectly balanced and cyclic structure of the novel, which will end with a similar incident. The 'train of history' and its inimical course of events crushing the hopeless individual under the burden of false pretensions of serving

the interests of community, remains a central theme in the novel, triggering harsh political diatribes.

What links the four characters in the novel is their interest in tailoring. *A Fine Balance* places the stress upon the changes produced in the structure of textile metaphors when caught between reality and politics. In the story, tailoring and sewing acquire a multitude of representations and significances, starting from the fact that they primarily stand for weaving human relationships. The four characters, traumatised by different unfortunate circumstances and life ordeals, relearn how to trust and care about other human beings through tailoring. It facilitates the tightening of their relations and a better understanding of oneself and of the others.

This bringing together of Indian characters coming from different castes is paradoxically the most praised and, simultaneously, the most criticised issue in the novel. Tabish Khair, the theoretician of Babu Discourses, finds characteristic for such novels as Mistry's *A Fine Balance* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), based on similar treatments of the problem of caste, what he calls *the hiranyagarbha syndrome* (Khair, 2005: 146). This represents the tendency to beautify the low-caste characters and endow them with moral, spiritual and intellectual attributes, usually ascribed to Babu characters. This extreme beautification does not allow them to be considered representatives of their castes.

The coherent dialogue created between these types of characters, otherwise highly unlikely, occurs, in Khair's opinion, at the expense of authenticity and verisimilitude. The writer is thus forced to "concoct a common language of communication for his characters" and since such a language does not really exist, "any such attempt automatically reduces the autonomy of the 'other' experience depicted in an Indian-English novel — as the language concocted belongs to the dominant section (from which both the author and the reader hail)" (2005: 141)

By keeping hands busy, tailoring allows the mind to wander, to acquire a "heightened awareness of noises" (Mistry, 1995: 56) — be they individual voices or political discourses — and provides the characters with a metaphorical unit of measuring and evaluating their life by needlework and the paddling of the sewing machine. It also offers a life lesson: "Waste nothing — remember, there is a purpose for everything" (1995: 56), translated on a literal level by their collecting scraps of fabric and on a metaphorical level by their enjoying simple things such as cooking and eating together, telling

stories and laughing together. Time itself is seen as a piece of fabric which, at times, stretches indefinitely, at other times loses its consistency acquiring ominous nuances and becomes a “noose around the neck, strangling slowly” (1995: 517).

If time were a bolt of cloth [...] I would cut out all the bad parts. Snip out of the scary nights and stitch together the good parts, to make time bearable. Then I could wear it like a coat, always live happily (Mistry, 1995: 310).

Each textile metaphor and each symbolic metamorphosis of tissue seem to occupy a dual, ambivalent position, pertaining both to the characters' lives and to the murky world of politics. The tailors' job is to sew fashionable dresses by using *paper patterns*. For our characters, this is a means of facilitating their work and saving their eyes from too much strain, but it also becomes a way of describing each of their workdays, finally lending their existence a sense of security and reliance. In this way “the pattern of each day [...] was like the pattern of a well-cut dress, the four of them fitting together without having to tug or to pull to make the edges meet. The seams were straight and neat” (Mistry, 1995: 388). Dreams and expectations seem to be cut out of paper patterns as well, since they always fail to come true. Politicians' promises of a better future also remain at the stage of “paper patterns”, as they never get beyond hypocritical speeches or deceitful, glossy banners promising entrance into an earthly paradise.

### 3. Textile metaphors and politics

Once transferred into the political realm, these textile and tailoring metaphors lose their sense of reliance and trust. The same happens to the different metaphorical metamorphoses of *tissue*. Characters are subtly associated to a particular type of tissue which says a lot about their personality and inclinations; they also give hints to future events. Ishvar and Om, due to their traditional family profession — that of cobblers — “belonging to the chamaar caste of tanners and leather-workers” (1995: 95) are associated to rough leather which they were bound to work upon. Together with this profession, they inherit the stink and odour of dead animals' skin, characterising, on a metaphorical level, the status of an *untouchable*, destined to pass through life as a living dead. Their apprenticeship as tailors represents a brave attempt to transcend their caste, which will be paid for with

sufferance and pain, for if “someone had dared to break the timeless chain of caste, retribution was bound to be swift” (1995: 95).

Cloth becomes for these two tailors the opposite of everything connoted by leather. Its comforting, reassuring smoothness obscures the ugly, distressing reality and makes them forget their condition. *Chiffon* will come to characterise the fragility of human relationships, the inconsistency of expectations in a period of historic turmoil and eventually, the illusory, transient happiness experienced by the four characters in Dina Dalal’s flat,

Om sat in the doorway, fingering a piece of chiffon he had slipped in his pocket yesterday from the scraps littering Dina Dalal’s floor. How comforting it felt, liquid between his fingers — why couldn’t life be like that, soft and smooth (1995: 185).

An interesting character study is offered by the description of Ibrahim, the rent collector, and his gradual physical and spiritual degradation, metonymically suggested by the plastic folder where he keeps his papers.

Why, he wondered, did he keep working now, making his rounds of the six buildings and collecting rent? Why did he not make a bonfire of the receipts and the cash, and throw himself onto it, drenched in kerosene? How was it that his heart kept beating instead of bursting, his sanity intact, instead of shattering like a dropped mirror? Was it all made of tough synthetic material, like the indestructible plastic folder? (1995: 90)

Ibrahim identifies himself with his plastic folder and borrows its rigidity hiding under the falsely pleasant covers a cowardly, deceptive humility and a harsh unscrupulousness. The ensuing dichotomy (plastic vs. tissue) opposes such groups of characters as Ibrahim, the rent collector, Nusswan — Dina’s brother, the Prime Minister (never mentioned by name, but easily recognisable), various clerks and officials and politicians, and on the other hand, Dina, Ishvar, Om, Maneck, Shankar — the beggar, together with other secondary characters. They also embody contrasting sets of values: unscrupulousness, cruelty, dishonesty, duplicity vs. endurance, flexibility, power of acceptance, consideration and real dignity (as opposed to the official dignity assumed by Ibrahim and suggested by his plastic folder). In an almost Wilde-like picture of Ibrahim, the plastic folder seems to bear the marks of Ibrahim, moral decay, the degradation of the folder equating his gradual downfall.

But plastic, too, had its allotted span of days and years. It could rip and tear and crack like buckram, he discovered. Like skin and bone, he realized with relief. It was simply a matter of patience. [...] He examined it from time to time, and saw reflected in its tired covers the furrows inflicted in his brow. The plastic divisions inside were starting to tear, and the neat compartments seemed ready to rebel; within his bodily compartments the rebellion had already begun. Which one would win this ridiculous race between plastic and flesh, he wondered (1995: 90).

Paper is also ambiguously present in the episode of the “trail of papers” (1995: 68) left behind by Dina, in the attempt to seek solutions to her problems and counteract the feeling of disorientation and confusion with a sense of order and coherence. The episode reminds the reader of the story of Hansel and Gretel, as Dina scatters around the city bits of paper with her name and address in the hope that she might find two skilful tailors to hire. It also finds its equivalent on the political stage: Dina’s trail of paper becomes a trail of slogans and banners littering the city and displaying fake promises when it comes to politics. Both paper and cloth become, when translated into political terms, the material support for hypocritical, deceptive and cruel demagogical propaganda.

Upon entering the city the visitor is greeted by posters advertising for different political leaders of the Indian National Congress, whose smiling portraits are ominously hanging over the streets. Propagandistic speeches hypocritically denounce the unjust system of caste and the concept of *untouchability* — seen as a disease (1995: 107) which has to be cured, “purged from our society, from our hearts and from our minds” (1995: 107) — and come in sheer contrast with the dreadful events in the novel. All the Prime Minister’s promises prove to be, in the end, a utopian vision turned bad. Images of impressive parades, shiny, colourful banners, flowery garlands around the necks of *politicos* addressing collectivities, come in antithesis with the gruesome panorama of the untouchables’ life and the sordid images of individuals getting stuck between the stitches of Time.

Rohinton Mistry’s bitter irony reaches its climax in the chapter entitled *Day at the Circus. Night in the Slum*, when the Prime Minister addresses the crowds at a ‘spontaneous’ meeting. People were promised payment for attending but were tricked into receiving nothing. Usually associated with political deceitfulness, paper now turns into cardboard as demagoguery and duplicity are pushed to the limit. The stage is sided by the wooden effigy of

Indira Gandhi: “The cardboard-and-plywood figure stood with arms outstretched, waiting as though to embrace the audience. An outline map of the country hung suspended behind the head, a battered halo” (1995: 262).

Indira Gandhi’s speech is an epitome of vain promises and empty words accompanied by vain gestures meant to certify her sincerity but grotesquely failing to achieve their purpose: rose petals thrown from a hot-air balloon in the sky, are eaten by a goatherd, packets which will not open, dazzling lights and colours impressing the people and Indira’s cardboard effigy falling down on people’s head, in a final attempt to “get on top of everyone” (1995: 267).

In political terms, paper becomes the metonym for history writing, taking sides, selecting and eliminating versions, erasing stories and illustrating everything with glossy portraits and catchy slogans: Your Motherland Needs You during the Emergency! Patriotism Is a Scared Duty! (1995: 281) Nation Is On the Move! The City Belongs To You, Keep It Beautiful! (1995: 303) Small Families Are Happy Families! (1995: 315)

Mistry’s *A Fine Balance* is acknowledged as a remarkable endeavour to recover the history of subaltern groups and to go beyond both post-colonial and post-Orientalist discourses, still avoiding the trap of essentialism. Mistry’s treatment of historic events (the central one being the Emergence and its terrible consequences upon the Indian people) goes in the direction of representing the multitudes of Indian histories and choosing a particular position most of the times identified with the victim’s subject position. His attempt is that of reviving what Gyan Prakash calls “history-from-below” (Prakash in Chaturvedi, 2000: 179), whose discursive formulation tries to avoid “both nativist romanticization and Orientalist distancing” (Prakash, 2000: 185).

Dipesh Chakrabarty speaks about a “history that embodies the politics of despair” (Chakrabarty, 1992: 23), a history mainly characterised by “failure”, “lack” and “inadequacy” (8), which seems to be the perspective also adopted by Mistry. This despair hindering any attempt of resistance and opposition leads to an entire *epic of the victim*. Going back once more to Khair’s analysis of *A Fine Balance* from the perspective of the Babu/Coolie discourses, he recognises in Mistry’s novel a “Babu-socialist valorisation of the poetry of poverty and suffering” (2005: 144), which in a certain way oversimplifies and reduces the “variety of subaltern experiences and responses” (id.) perpetuating the structures of the past, since no character

manages to go beyond their conditions. In fact, Mistry's novel, with all its intertextual references, seems to be another pessimistic reformulation of Spivak's question *Can the subaltern speak?*

In *A Fine Balance*, resistance is always reduced to an individual (and very often theoretical) reaction and — in spite of the highly politicised nature of Indian society during and after the Emergence — not based on any kind of organised and active effort by the Coolie classes. The end result of such an individualised and reduced notion of resistance can only be a repetition of oppression — by which the central protagonists are actually reduced to beggary, and blithely living on the charity of Babu classes and castes (Khair, 2005: 144).

The historic event of the Partition is explained as the drawing of a magnetic line on a paper map. The emphasis is, however, not placed upon colonial indictment, but upon censoring the passive acceptance of history and the too easily embraced subaltern position (Nandy, 1970: 62):

Two nations incarnated out of one. A foreigner drew a magnetic line on a map and called it a new border; it became a river of blood upon the earth. And the orchards, fields, factories, businesses, all on the wrong side of that line, vanished with a wave of the pale conjurer's wand (Khair, 2005: 205).

In Mistry's novel, the Partition becomes a metaphorical condition which is ceaselessly, ironically reiterated, destroying lives and shattering hopes as invisible (though painfully inflicted) lines are drawn on symbolical maps. They randomly divide spaces (as in the episode in which the idyllic mountain landscape where Maneck's family used to live and run their business is destroyed so that roads and factories should be built), communities (by applying false categorisations or social and religious prejudices) and families (Ishvar and Om's family are exterminated). "Only this time it was an indigenous surveyor's cartogram, not a foreigner's imperial map" (Mistry, 1995: 216) that divided the people, which is even more painful. The art of surviving lies in the ability to move among these divisions without getting lost in their labyrinthine categories.

You cannot draw lines and compartments and refuse to budge beyond them. Sometimes you have to maintain a fine balance between hope and despair [...] In the end it's all a question of balance (1995: 231).



What Mistry's characters learn when facing the imperfect world governed by political interests is that "the secret of survival is to embrace change and adopt" (1995: 230). That is what Dina does when she loses her tailors, her small tailoring business, her flat and her much strived for independence. That is what Ishvar and Om do when they are left without shelter, mistaken for beggars and convicted to work on an irrigation site, sterilised (and Om, even castrated) and finally reduced to the condition of beggars. They draw their inner power from something beyond the horrible ordeal they are forced to endure, perhaps from the invisible threads of friendship and human solidarity that connect them. Maneck, in his turn, is unable to accept the shattering of the blissful, familiar world around him and commits suicide.

#### 4. The patch in the quilt

One of the most powerful and significant elements in the text is the *quilt* Dina starts making out of scraps of fabric she collects and combines with utter skill. She confesses in one of her discussions with Maneck:

'People collect all kinds of things. Stamps, coins, postcards. I have cloth, instead of a photo album or scrapbook.'

[...] 'Too many different colours and designs', he said. [...] I mean it's going to be very difficult to match them properly.'

'Difficult, yes, but that's where taste and skill come in. What to select, what to leave out — and which goes next to which' (1995: 273).

The quilt, which gradually comes to be a part of the lives of all the residents in Dina's flat, becomes an integral element of many metaphors in the text. Collecting pieces of cloth starts as a game, offering Dina oblivion and relaxation, courage during hard times, a necessary clutch to help her move on, "her bedtime story" (1995: 573). Eventually the quilt lures all four of them to take part in its making. The patches in the quilt stand for unconventional units for measuring the passage of time and at the same time they become symbolic threads, tightening the relationship between the four characters of the novel.

Made of "squares, triangles and polygons" cut out of different fabrics of different colours and textures, the quilt becomes a witness of their daily

lives besides being a token of their friendship and a symbol of human solidarity.

At night they busied themselves with the quilt. The stack of remnants was shrinking in the absence of new material, making her resort to pieces she had avoided so far, like the flimsy chiffon, not really suitable for her design. They sewed it into little rectangular pouches and stuffed in fragments of more substantial cloth. Then the chiffon ran out, the quilt ceased to grow (1995: 256).

Each patch is taken to metonymically stand for a particular event so that the entire quilt is seen as a kaleidoscopic panorama of their life, at times utterly confusing and distressing, at other times beautiful and coherent.

In a pointillist manner, it is made out of apparently meaningless “bits and rags”, which gain their coherence when seen together for “the whole quilt is much more important than any single square” (1995: 450). LIFE IS A (PATCHED) QUILT is one of the governing metaphors in the text. Making the quilt the equivalent of an eclectic historical discourse where voices, versions of histories and historiographies, official political records and silenced folk stories combine and compete blurs the coherent pattern all Mistry’s characters are so eager to discover.

The illusive pattern in the quilt, reminding us of Henry James’s *pattern in the carpet*, is a recurrent motive in the text, referring not only to narrative devices — since the text itself is meant to equate the design of the quilt — and the overall structure, but also to the impossibility to pinpoint the most important among so many different textures and colours. Everything in the novel — discourses and counter discourses, the way in which stories are woven within its structure, the manner in which characters are built — mirrors in the end the structure of the quilt.

I prefer to think God is a giant quiltmaker. With an infinite variety of designs. And the quilt is growing so big and confusing, the pattern is impossible to see, the squares and diamonds and triangles don’t fit well together anymore, it’s all become meaningless. So he has abandoned it (1995: 340).

Working and living together, completing the quilt with new patches, weaving stories and memories into its making, corresponds to the new direction in their life, making them “sail under the same flag” (1995: 399). Balance seems to be achieved at this point and the *pattern* of their days is

finally discovered for “tailors are practised in examining patterns, reading the outlines” (1995: 401). Flags, too, lose their significance when taken out of the domestic happiness of Dina’s flat and are brought into the streets of Bombay, where they become empty signifiers. Like the flags, the quilt finds its equivalent on the political stage where they become ‘oral quilts’, rhetorically sewn by politicians out of empty words and deceitful promises.

All the events in the lives of the four protagonists are represented by the patches of fabric they were working on, on that particular occasion. “Dina resumed her work on the quilt. Except for a two-square foot gap at one end, it had grown to the size she wanted, seven by six” (1995: 489). The gap in the quilt, the one Dina is eager to fill so that her work should be complete, can be regarded as the symbolic ‘textile’ representation of the future: sometimes predictable due to the general pattern of the fabric, other times wholly unforeseeable because of the unexpectedness of the break in the pattern. This is precisely what happens, as the last patch in the quilt is a series of tragic events which provokes the downfall of all the characters.

If, at a certain point in the text, the quilt is the most meaningful element in whose making feeling, memories, stories and lives have been woven, at the end of the book it too seems to have lost its significance. The pattern is lost in a general confusion, the balance is disturbed and all lives are shattered.

In her room, Dina folded up the quilt. The patchwork had transformed her silence into unbidden words; it had to be locked away now in the wardrobe. She was frightened of the strange magic it worked on her mind, frightened of where its terrain was leading her. She did not want to cross that border permanently (1995: 573).

Once the quilt gets stuck in an unrepeatable past the only option to come to terms with a terrible present is to relinquish it.

Similarly, at different moments in the story, the patches in the quilt metaphorically represent memories. To the same extent, they represent the way in which the narrative unfolds, being constructed out of “patches” of the characters’ life stories, heavily relying upon flashbacks. The patches also allude to the characters’ intertwined stories, which have to be ‘patched’ and ‘tailored’ together, the seams sometime intersecting. The accumulation of the patches in the quilt marks the unfolding of the story and a celebration of diversity and eclecticism typical for the writers coming from India. The

'fabric' of the narrative weaves together history and politics, personal dramas and historic traumas, humour and tragedy alongside with various flavours and textures coming from the Indian culture and mythology.

## 5. Conclusion

Rohinton Mistry's novel, *A Fine Balance*, both praised and criticised for the way in which it decides to deal with the problem of the untouchables, tackles a wide range of issues, that places it among the best novels in contemporary Indian literature written in English. Covering the gap represented by a scarcity of writings dealing with life in the Indian country side and with people belonging to lower castes, this novel falls, however, in the same trap of idealizing both characters and human relationships. Still, the story preserves an intense realistic and naturalistic touch and political criticism that reaches its climax in scenes of extreme sarcasm.

Accused of coming up with a common language between castes that would not be possible in real life and of "Babuization" of Coolie discourses, Rohinton Mistry succeeds instead in creating a vivid panorama of Indian conflicting realities. However, the common language that unites all the main characters in the novel offers a common, coherent and totally acceptable kind of language in the extensive use of textile metaphors. They help translate reality, politics, human emotions and relationships into textile images. Out of all these, the "patch in the quilt" comes to represent Mistry's view of life, of Indian history and of the narrative material in the novel.

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# DETECTIVES BY CHANCE: HUMBERT HUMBERT AND DANIEL QUINN IN SEARCH FOR NARRATIVE

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**Abstract:** *Vladimir Nabokov and Paul Auster both employ the principle of chance in their work. The paper will discuss the narrative strategies in *Lolita* and *The New York Trilogy*, where chance operates as a means of expressing necessity (Bakhtin) and as a device for reworking the detective novel genre.*

**Keywords:** *authorship, detective novel, metafiction, postmodernism, space, subject.*

## 1. Introduction

The two texts brought into connection here, although separated by a thirty-year gap, demonstrate a high level of metafictionality. *Lolita*, as it is commonly understood, is a playground of a dozen genres, while *City of Glass*, the first short novel in *New York Trilogy*, heavily uses (and abuses) mainly one, that of the detective novel. The paper will discuss the ways in which Vladimir Nabokov and Paul Auster treat, change and deconstruct the genre conventions in order to create their own narratives, which probe stability and meaning of texts in the contemporary world.

## 2. Detectives of their Own

It is generally accepted that E. A. Poe originated the detective form with his Parisian tales of C. Auguste Dupin. The amateur sleuth and his companion were an inspiration to Doyle's Sherlock Holmes in England, while in 20<sup>th</sup> century United States, the writers of *The Black Mask* magazine, primarily Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett, created the American counterparts. Although both Nabokov and Auster are quite clearly aware of the tradition, their 'detectives' bear no resemblance to the characters of any of

the famous detectives. They use the knowledge to create their own metafictional, metaphysical sleuths, with whom everything comes into question.

Furthermore, both Auster and Nabokov were undoubtedly aware of various rules imposed on the writers of detective fiction prior to writing their stories, and, consequently, did their utmost to deliberately break them. For instance, both writers dutifully ignore the tenth in the ‘Ten Commandments of Detective Fiction’, written in 1929 by Ronald Knox (which states that “twin brothers, and doubles generally, must not appear unless we have been duly prepared for them” — see Knox, 1929), Auster more deliberately so, as the introduction of a mysterious double early on in the story is the precise moment when all pretences of a conventional detective narrative are dropped.

Both Nabokov and Auster ignore the prohibition of “literary dallying with side issues /.../ or /.../ subtly worked-out character analyses” (Van Dine, 1928), and, most importantly, at least in what the subject of this paper is concerned, both writers tread all over Knox’s sixth commandment that “No accident must ever help the detective” (Knox, 1929). Quite the opposite, in fact, for both Nabokov and Auster rely heavily on accident, i.e. chance, when their characters are in need of either a trigger which will move them into action, or a solution which, at some other point in literary history, might be regarded as a *deus ex machina*, but which, in the context of Postmodernism, proves to be not only logical, but sometimes the only possible solution.

### 2.1. Skeleton in the Genre

When *Lolita* is concerned, coincidences and chance play a large role in the plot: from Humbert’s becoming Mrs Haze’s lodger only after an unfortunate (or, as Humbert might regard it, fortunate) fire had prevented him from settling in the house previously agreed upon, to the car accident which ever-so-conveniently removes the threat of Charlotte Haze, all the way to the fateful night in *The Enchanted Hunters*, where lack of double rooms forces him to share the ‘wedding bed’ with Lolita. Nabokov, always a foe to established conventions, uses these events to mock Victorian *deus-ex-machina* solutions and to show that what might, at first sight, be seen as a stroke of good fortune, does not necessarily have to be proven as such (as those strokes of good fortune usually, in the long run, turn out to be gold-coated stones paving Humbert’s path into hell). Thus, as is most often the



case in his fiction, Nabokov makes fun of both the character and the reader.

In the case of Auster's work, *chance* is one of the crucial notions. It might be said that, after more than thirty years of writing novels, it is the one constantly present. However, detectives should not rely on chance in the process of case-solving. It is true that they need luck, but chance is something that might ruin their investigation (let alone the writer's reputation). It is different with narratives and narrators, though. For them, chance is very often the easiest way out. In *City of Glass*, chance plays its role only to make Quinn's position more difficult (eg. two Stillmans coming out of the train instead of one, the red notebook, even the way Quinn sees the 'letters' out of Stillman's paths). It even seems that the casual slip from third to first person narration also happens by chance, as if the 'author' could not stand 'Auster's' passivity and tried to point to the real culprit.

Due to its self-conscious nature, *City of Glass* is often classified as a metafictional detective novel. Time, space, characters, all of the stable points of the narrative are weakened and undermined, showing the author's understanding of the world and the stories in it. Daniel Quinn, the writer of detective novels, becomes a detective by coincidence. Several misdirected phone calls placed for a detective named Paul Auster persuade him to switch roles and, instead of writing yet another novel, he becomes a 'real' detective. The job he takes up looks like a case, only it is not: there is no criminal, no victim, no crime, therefore nothing to solve. There is only an idea of the case which Quinn, with his narrative strategies, tries to develop.

Thus, he performs the role of the detective by following Peter Stillman Senior on his walks through the streets of Manhattan as he is guided by the rules of his fictional detective, Max Work. It really appears to be the work which occupies his entire being to the point of vanishing. However, the rules of the fictional detective which apply to the text do not apply to the outer, postmodern world. Quinn's issues with identity, language and the space he inhabits deny him the possibility of acting as a case-solving subject. His place in life, the language and the city is heavily distorted to the point that he, although influenced by everything, cannot influence anything.

The first, impulsive reaction which perpetuates the whole action, when he assumes the identity of the detective Paul Auster, is the last thing he does of his own free will. In the detective genre proper, Lefebvre's *container model of space* (which he defines as an empty sphere to be filled

with objects and actions without ever being changed by anything — see 1991) can be applied. Therefore, whenever a detective is solving a crime he tries to put things back into their original place. Or, in Richard Swope's words (2008: online), the detective's function involves delineating or re-inscribing the position of all subjects. His primary task is to re-establish order (through surveillance) and return every object and subject to their ideologically appointed space.

## 2.2 Bending the Rules

Nabokov subverts the genre of detective fiction in *Lolita* by turning all the notions usually associated with it upside-down. For instance, the criminal and his crime are introduced at the very beginning, but the victim is yet to be identified — which turns *Lolita* into an inverted detective story. However, there is more than just one detective story in the novel, as can be seen from the protagonist's changing roles. At the beginning, Humbert is a predator who later turns into a real criminal, by kidnapping and raping Lolita. However, he is gradually turned into the victim who is being followed and eventually betrayed, which leads him to becoming a detective, in search of Lolita and her kidnapper. Finally, after the murder of Clare Quilty, Humbert is again the culprit, thus closing the circle.

Moreover, Humbert is a woefully inadequate detective, as he is concerned too much with the poetic and too little with the practical side of things. Thus, he is able to identify a 'nymphet' among a group of school girls:

You have to be an artist, and a madman, a creature of infinite melancholy /.../ in order to discern at once, by ineffable signs /.../ the little deadly demon among the wholesome children; she stands unrecognized by them and unconscious herself of her fantastic power (Nabokov, 1991: 17),

but incapable of realising who it was that took Lolita away from him, despite all the clues in the text which any careful reader easily picks up on. This makes Humbert, apart from other things, a victim of dramatic irony as well.

## 3. Clueless Detectives

With Auster, as with Nabokov, the logic of the detective genre is undermined from several directions. Both with Humbert and with Quinn, the

inability to solve the mystery is tightly connected to their shattered identities, their notion of language and the mental disorientation in space. Part of the explanation/excuse for the lameness of Quinn's detecting abilities lies in the fact that he negates, or denies his own existence and only tries to remain on the surface of life. The moment he loses his wife and son (in an unnamed accident) his identity starts to crumble.

### 3.1. Shattered Identities

Quinn's self was determined by the conventional notions of family, home and friends. The disappearance of one element causes his alienation from the other two. During the course of the novel, as the 'case' starts to occupy the central position in his life, since he clings to it as the sole source of meaning, he is robbed off of the remaining elements that gave him some sort of position in the world: his apartment has been let due to his long absence, and he is on the verge of physical vanishing by starvation. The two shells (his apartment and his body) that protected him from whatever might come from the outside literally and metaphorically disappear, providing him with the unwanted freedom to be whoever he wants.

Daniel Quinn does, however, not know who he is or who he wants to be. At the very beginning of the novel we are confronted with the fact that Quinn actually has three names: his real name, the name on the covers of his books, William Wilson, his pseudonym, and the name of his detective, Max Work, with whom he often identifies. This 'triad' of personalities might find some purpose in a detective novel about undercover assignments, but on the ontologically unsafe ground of Auster's fiction, it only enhances the identity problem. Therefore, Quinn is everything but a detective. Instead of solving the name puzzle, the conventional detective must have a stable identity in order to be able to solve crimes, i.e. in order for readers to trust him. The space he occupies (his office, apartment, city streets) should be deprived of ambiguity as a contrast to chaos and disruption brought on by the crime.

Humbert, too, has many identity issues. His self is both fragmented and multiplied. His very name, which is a strangely repetitive pseudonym (Humbert Humbert), is the initial indication that he has to lead a double life in order to keep his little secret — secret. Just like Daniel Quinn, who hides behind various identities and builds up facades in order to be able to function and hide (from himself) the emptiness within, Humbert keeps up

appearances and shows the world a respectable face in order to hide the monstrosity within. Unlike Quinn, however, Humbert is very much aware of what he desperately tries to hide, and cloaks himself into a persona that is very difficult to define.

Thus, he is of mixed origin. His father is a “salad of racial genes: a Swiss citizen, of mixed French and Austrian descent, with a dash of the Danube in his veins” (Nabokov, 1991: 9), while his mother is English. He is a foreigner who sticks out in the American province (not least because of his paedophilia), but thanks to his manners and respectable work, he is well-received. The scene which best shows both this double life and the fragmentation of Humbert’s self is the one when he and Lolita arrive at The Enchanted Hunters hotel, and, during the course of a single conversation, he is called no less than four names (Humberg/Humbug/Herbert/Humbert).

### **3.2. Lost in Language**

Humbert is only too acutely aware of language and sound, all that is poetic and literary, which cannot be the case with a real detective, who, above all, needs to be practical and pragmatic. Humbert’s inability to trace Lolita down is hinted at in the famous opening lines of the novel. Although he is utterly fascinated with the mere sound of Lolita’s name, it turns out that he cannot pronounce it right (since ‘t’ is an alveolar, not a dental sound, his tongue would not ‘tap, on three, on the teeth’), which foreshadows the fact that he never truly possessed Lolita. Humbert is, perhaps unconsciously, aware of his inability to function outside of the world of language, as exemplified by his famous lament — “Oh, my Lolita, I have only words to play with!” (Nabokov, 1991: 32)

It is not, therefore, surprising that Humbert sets upon looking for Lolita in the pages of hotel register books, desperately searching for clues to point him towards her kidnapper. Thus, it is rather a cruel joke at the hands of the author that Humbert should be outwitted in his own game, for Quilty is also a master of language (a playwright), but practical to boot (unlike Humbert the poet), and consequently proves too clever to easily find. When Humbert receives a letter from Lolita, it also seems to be a *deus-ex-machina* solution. However, it is perhaps the only possible solution, for words and language (in the form of the letter) are what he can understand, and therefore only natural as a clue. Furthermore, it should perhaps be noted that one of the first

things Humbert does, both when he loses Lolita and when he finally confronts Quilty, is to compose/read a poem about Lolita.

### 3.3. Spatial Dilemmas

Just like Quinn, Humbert is a character who does not have a stable spatial position. Unlike Quinn, who, having once, long ago, belonged somewhere, mostly faces a problem of uprootedness, Humbert has always been completely placeless, destined to remain an outsider forever, no matter where he goes. He will always be a stranger in a strange land, among strange people. This can be seen from the fact that he does not own a home, but is always a lodger, a tenant, a hotel guest somewhere. Indeed, even his alleged childhood paradise was but a hotel.

Since Humbert, unlike Quinn, is not dependent on space, or rather, on the notion of belonging to or occupying a certain space, he finds it rather meaningless. Thus, both Humbert the detective and Humbert the narrator choose to widen the space rather than narrow it down, as exemplified by their always being 'on the road' and widening the scope of the novel with many allusions, descriptions, digressions and so forth. That is, again, opposite to what Daniel Quinn, who is confined within space to such an extent that he ends up literally disappearing, does.

## 4. The Detecting Reader

Thus, Humbert the detective cannot satisfactorily fulfil his task and find Lolita's kidnapper without help. Humbert the narrator needs to step in and strategically place clues for the reader to find, and then wait, at the finish line, for Humbert the detective to catch up. Indeed, in both Auster's and Nabokov's works, the role of the detective is assigned to the reader. Both authors' readers are detectives of the intertextual kind: they try not only to gather the clues concerning the 'case' that exist in the story, but also to follow the writers' traces while they move through world literature in order to get their special insight into the narratives.

Nabokov makes several allusions to detective fiction, inviting the reader along. For instance, at an early point in the story, while Humbert is listing the works available in his prison library, he mentions, among other works, *A Murder is Announced* by Agatha Christie. On the very next page, a work entitled *The Murdered Playwright* is mentioned, and the two clues should

point the reader towards the yet unnamed victim whose murder had sent Humbert to prison in the first place.

The economical style of detective fiction, so highly praised by Daniel Quinn in *City of Glass*, is actually a trap. By using relatively simple, seemingly transparent sentences, Auster presents us with the topic of language in his novel. In an embedded story about Peter Stillman Senior's dissertation we are given the reasons for his insane idea to isolate his son from the rest of the world. His expectations were that, without the bad influence of the word, his son would start speaking the prelapsarian language, the language of Adam. While in contemporary New York, Stillman Sr. acts as a detective himself. His daily walks seem a meticulous search for clues of some sort which Quinn is unable to ponder. When he confronts him with the question, we find out about the project that seems insane, yet containing a shred of truth.

...our words no longer correspond to the world. When things were whole, we felt confident that our words could express them. But little by little these things have broken apart, shattered, collapsed into chaos. And yet our words have remained the same. They have not adapted themselves to the new reality (Auster, 1990: 77).

He invents words for things that have lost the connection with their existing signifiers. In a similar vein, the detective genre lost the connection with Auster's narrative. The readers are, just like Quinn, heavily deluded in their expectations that the story they read is something familiar. We follow the rules but they get broken; Quinn follows the pattern but somehow it is not the right one. Consequently, the clue must be (in) the space.

## 5. Conclusion

Such rather serious interventions in the detective novel genre serve its high modernist/postmodernist purpose quite fittingly: both authors have managed to create narratives which force the reader to view things in a different way, to kick the habit out of reading, and also to present the dominant cultural and social forces of the time. We might say that Auster's narrative feeds on itself: we are offered not one but several keys which open no doors. The act of writing and the free space in the red notebook are the *sine qua non* of the protagonist's existence in the text, and in life. He van-

ishes gradually but inevitably, realizing that the drift of the story carries him to a simulation of the end and, after that, anything is possible.

Quinn no longer had any interest in himself. He wrote about stars, the earth, his hopes for mankind. He felt that his words had been severed from him, that now they are a part of the world at large, as real and specific as a stone, or a lake, or a flower. They no longer had anything to do with him (Auster, 1990: 130).

Nabokov's toying with the genre is more means than ends. It is more outer than inner, unlike that of Auster. *Lolita* offers a neither flattering nor comforting image of postwar America, making Humbert look less guilty but more cunning in his successful use of its many weaknesses. *City of Glass* refers to urban spaces, crowds and solitude; *Lolita* refers to both small towns and open spaces. Both Humbert and Quinn depend on their mobility, but while Humbert needs a vehicle to run away from everything in order to preserve his notion of who he is, Quinn walks the streets of Manhattan in order to forget, to lose himself in the crowd.

With Nabokov, both natural and architectural spaces are rather passive and often abused by the narrator. Auster creates a dynamic and interactive relation between the protagonist and the space he inhabits, since it is the one element left that defines him. Both writers eventually prove that a pseudo-detective story with a horrendously underachieving investigator, whose primary concern is not the pragmatic, but the linguistic and/or poetic, and whose experience of space is at best meaningless, at worst insidiously destructive, can turn out to be just as captivating, delightful and inspiring, as any one of the stories populated by a legion of smugly superior armchair experts or hard-boiled private eyes.

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# *CULTURAL REMAPPINGS*



# AND WOMEN TOOK OVER ARTHURIANA

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**Abstract:** *Women in Arthurian literature have traditionally followed two patterns: they are considered evil or they are thought to be the real cause for the fall of Camelot. These two visions have radically changed in Modern Literature and it is in Bernard Cornwell's trilogy that these innovations are most obvious, as I intend to demonstrate in this paper.*

**Keywords:** *history, feminine characters, modern Arthurian literature, medieval Arthurian literature, religion.*

## 1. Introduction

Whenever the word *Arthuriana* is mentioned, it conjures up a selection of characters, mainly masculine, such as Arthur, Lancelot, Gawain, Merlin, Mordred or Uther Pendragon. However, the stories of Arthur and his men would not have developed were it not for the part women played: who bewitches Accolon in order to kill Arthur with his own sword? Who turns Sir Bercilak into a horrendous green giant? Who puts Merlin into a glass tower — or within a mountain, depending on the version — and keeps him there until the end of time? Who provokes, indirectly, the doom and fall of the Round Table? For better or for worse, the answer to these questions is a woman's name.

These characters have to atone in different ways. Morgan, Arthur's half-sister and a horrible witch, is either killed or vanishes from the court. Guinevere becomes a nun in order to expiate her sins. Two more types of female characters can also be seen in *Arthuriana*. On the one hand, the dame who goes to court to ask for help from Arthur and his men and who, almost invariably, ends up falling in love or marrying the hero. On the other hand, the ugly lady who sorts out the hero's problem and, as a means of compensation, marries him. This ugly, old lady becomes young and beautiful on the wedding night.

## 2. Changes in modern Arthuriana

Contemporary Arthuriana has shifted from this traditional, male-oriented view to a different one, wherein women occupy a more determining role. It was during the Victorian period that the first examples of this change — such as William Morris's (1834-1896) long poem "The Defence of Guinevere" (1858) — could be seen. In the early twentieth century, this new wave became more evident: in 1911, the American poet Sara Teasdale (1884-1933) wrote "Guinevere", in which the queen, in a wonderful monologue, comments on her affair with Lancelot. Teasdale also wrote other poems with women as central characters, such as "Galahad in the Castle of Maidens" (1911) or "At Tintagil" (1926), where Iseult remembers her love for Tristan. The British author Rosalind Miles (b. 1943) also chose Arthur's wife as the main character in *Guinevere: Queen of the Summer Country* (1999).

Another modern writer who has paid attention to women in her novels is Rosemary Sutcliff (1920-1992), whose *The Lantern Bearers* deals with the Roman withdrawal from the British Isles. The subsequent Saxon invasion is seen through the eyes of Aquila, a Romano-British Imperialist soldier haunted by two women: his sister, whom he fails to save from a marriage to a Saxon chieftain, and Ness, his wife, the daughter of a Nationalist chieftain who supports Vortigern. In *The Road to Avalon* (1988), Joan Wolf (b. 1951) concentrates on Arthur's infatuation with his aunt Morgan. Marion Zimmer Bradley's (1930-1999) *The Mists of Avalon* (1982) is a meditation on Arthur's rise and fall through the eyes and lives of four women: devout Guinevere, his beautiful aunt Morgause, Viviane, Priestess of Avalon, and Morgaine, Arthur's sister and lover.

This trend has shown little sign of abating. Indeed, it continues even in the literature written by men, as in the case of *The Warlord Chronicles*, a trilogy written by Bernard Cornwell (b. 1944). Consisting in *The Winter King* (1996), *Enemy of God* (1997) and *Excalibur* (1998), this trilogy resuscitates some commonplaces and long-forgotten characters in the Arthurian tradition. The (hi)story of this kaleidoscopic group of novels is retold by Derfel Cadarn, one of Arthur's soldiers and best friends, during his final years in a monastery in North Wales, where he puts on parchment Arthur's life, as commanded by Queen Igraine of Powys. The time that Derfel covers in his retelling begins with Mordred's birth on a cold winter night (hence the title of the first book) and finishes with the famous battle of Camlann, where

Arthur kills his nephew and the latter mortally wounds Uther Pendragon's son.

The role of women writers in medieval literature is almost inexistent. There are very few exceptions, such as Marie de France in the Arthurian universe. As Wynne-Davies stated, "no woman wrote about the Arthurian material until the nineteenth century, and [...] a significant female contribution to the myths did not really begin until the twentieth century." (1996: 2). Furthermore, considering the characters, Wynne-Davies affirms that they are "recurring representations of the virgin and the whore, the dutiful and the unchaste wives, the hag and the lady" (1996: 5). By way of contrast, modern authors such as Zimmer Bradley or Stewart depict female characters as firmly independent, since "they choose their own partners on the basis of a personal desire" (Wynne-Davies, 1998: 6).

This clearly reflects the freedom that Celtic women enjoyed at a certain stage in the past. For instance, this was the case of Queen Cartimandua, who repudiated her husband and took his charioteer as a lover. In Bernard Cornwell's trilogy, the four main female characters move freely within a male world. Nimue beds Merlin and Derfel. Ceinwyn elopes with the man she loves and does not marry the one she is betrothed to. Guinevere marries Arthur out of ambition and when she finds out that he does not want to be a king, she becomes Lancelot's lover in order to achieve her aim of becoming a queen; finally, Morgan marries Bishop Sansum, to avoid her loneliness. These four women perfectly represent the idea which Wynne-Davies explains, that the struggle between male and female has now opened to different ways of feminism. In other words, these four characters understand femininity in different ways

### **3. The case of the female characters in *The Warlord Chronicles***

Out of the four main characters in the trilogy, Morgan is probably the least feminist of all, as she gives up her freedom and religious creed when marrying Sansum. While to the bishop the wedding brings more power, influence, and money, the compensation for Uther's daughter is of a different nature, as Merlin, who did not attend the marriage, asserts:

"She is lonely," he told me when he heard the news, "and the mouse-lord is at least company. You don't think they rut together, do you? Dear Gods, Derfel, if

poor Morgan undressed in front of Sansum he'd throw up! Besides, he does not know how to rut. Not with women, anyway" (Cornwell, 1997: 265).

Morgan is not going to be the diabolic character pictured in the Middle Ages, constantly plotting against her brother, as in Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*:

Arthur betook the scabbard into Morgan Le Fay her sister, and she loved another knight better than her husband King Uriens or King Arthur. And she would have Arthur her brother slain, and therefore she let make another scabbard for Excalibur like it by enchantment, and gave the scabbard Excalibur to her love (1998: 41).

In *The Warlord Chronicles*, Morgan is an embittered woman who lost her husband in a fire which charred the left-hand side of her body. She is very intelligent, but very ill-tempered. She feels lonely and this is probably her most characteristic feature. One of the moments where Morgan shows her lonesomeness is after her father's death, King Uther, when she locks herself up in a hut for days on end to weep, until her brother Arthur comes back from Armorica to see her and "when he offered to embrace her she began to cry behind her gold mask [...] He held her tight and patted her back. "Dear Morgan," I heard him say, "dear, sweet Morgan." I had never realised how lonely Morgan was until I saw her weep in her brother's arms" (Cornwell, 1996: 117-8). This good fraternal relation is a topic that Cornwell has taken from some texts in the Middle Ages (such as the Catalan texts *La faula* (c.1370) and *Tirant lo Blanc*, written c.1460), where Morgan is a good sister looking for a solution to Arthur's sorrows.

The most interesting feature we can observe in Morgan is her change of religion, prompted by her marriage to Sansum. She will be no more "the priestess of Merlin, the adept of the mysteries, the pagan Morgan" (Cornwell, 1997: 263). She becomes "strident in her protestations of Christ as she had ever been in her service of the older Gods and after her marriage all her formidable will was poured into Sansum's missionary campaign" (Cornwell, 1997: 265). This striking shift from medieval literature, which mainly condemned her for being a sorceress, could explain why she is the least feminist character in the trilogy. Notwithstanding, Cornwell still keeps some of her best-known features, such as her spite and enmity against

Guinevere. Her role as the constant plotter opposed to Camelot has been taken over by Nimue.

The second female character to whom we pay attention is Guinevere. Shortly after her marriage, she creates a sort of entourage at the court, from which Morgan will be excluded on the grounds that “Guinevere wants no one but the beautiful around her and where does that leave Morgan?” (Cornwell, 1996: 362). In fact, there are more examples of this animosity between the two women throughout the trilogy. Arthur’s wife disagrees with Morgan, becoming the first woman ever appointed in the High Council of Britain, since “Guinevere would let no woman be a councillor if she could not be one herself, and besides, Guinevere hated anything that was ugly and, the Gods know, poor Morgan was grotesque even with her gold mask in place” (Cornwell, 1997: 77).

The enmity between Guinevere and Morgan is one of the commonplaces of Arthuriana and it seems to “have already been current at the end of the twelfth century, known to the Guiot copyist, if not necessarily to Chrétien himself” (Larrington, 2006: 41). However, the most famous example of this rivalry appears in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, where Morgan bewitches Sir Bercilak to distress Guinevere. Cornwell, for his part, has made a twist on the topic of the two women’s hatred. In medieval literature, both women were competing for the love of the same man (Lancelot). While Morgan was usually described as beautiful and lascivious, here she is just the opposite (see quote above) and their enmity comes from the difference in their religious ideas and from Guinevere’s ideas about beauty.

Arthur’s wife undergoes, however, another interesting change. While in the medieval texts she is a pious Christian who becomes a nun to expiate her sins for the affair she and Lancelot have had (she explains it clearly in the stanzaic *Le Morte Darthur*, vv. 3638-45 and 3662-69), in the case of Cornwell’s trilogy she despises and hates the Christians to the extent of denigrating them. When Guinevere shows Derfel the new church that the Christians are building on the site where a Roman temple once stood, she complains bitterly and angrily: “It was where people worshipped Mercury,” Guinevere said, “but now we’re to have a shrine for a dead carpenter instead. And how will a dead carpenter give us good crops, tell me that!” (Cornwell, 1996: 238). When Bishop Sansum is supervising the work, he greets them, but Guinevere confronts him mercilessly: “I’m not doing you

honour, you worm. I came to show Derfel what carnage you're making. How can you worship in that?" (Cornwell, 1996: 239)

Her hatred towards Christians grows in the trilogy. When Arthur finds out about her affair with Lancelot, he decides to divorce her, spare her life and imprison her in a nunnery run by Morgan. We can understand this as another turn from the medieval texts: there Morgan imprisons Lancelot (not Guinevere) against his will, while here she is just obeying her brother's commands. When the war against the Saxons is approaching, Derfel goes to the nunnery and asks her if she prefers to go to safety with him or with Morgan, to which Guinevere replies: "So, I can travel with you to Corinium, or go to Siluria with the Christian cows? I think I've heard enough Christian hymns to last me a lifetime" (Cornwell, 1998: 172).

As for her affair with Lancelot, Guinevere is quite clear: it was not love, although everyone thought so:

She closed her eyes and for a few seconds I was not sure whether she was laughing or crying. Then I saw it was laughter that made her shudder.

"You are a fool," she said looking at me again. "You're trying to help me! Do you think I love Lancelot? [...] I wanted him to be king because he's a weak man and a woman can only rule in this world through such a feeble man" (Cornwell, 1998: 127).

This quote shows Guinevere's feminism and the way she understands it: she wants the power to herself and she knows how to get it. Yet, there is something else that describes her as a fifteenth-century woman with a twentieth-century mind: her task as a mother. Unlike most women in those times, Guinevere does not like being a mother and she confesses so:

She was bitterly angry now. "Cows make good mothers and sheep suckle perfectly adequately, so what merit lies in motherhood? Any stupid girl can become a mother! It's all that most of them are fit for! Motherhood isn't an achievement, it's an inevitability (Cornwell, 1998: 123).

These views on motherhood are very modern. Coppélia Kahn (1985) states that, to some feminist critics, gender is less a biological fact than a social product. Motherhood itself is also a consequence and Guinevere, as previously stated, does not accept the society she lives in. If motherhood, as Kahn says, is an oppression of women, Guinevere understands it as a handicap to fulfilling her aims. Taking all this into account, we can conclude that



she is the most openly feminist character in the trilogy, who wants to live her own life independently, without any imposition. Unfortunately, the world she lives in will not let her do so.

We have briefly seen how the roles of Guinevere and Morgan have reversed from those in the medieval texts. There still remain two more female characters to deal with. The first one is Ceinwyn, a character that Cornwell has rescued from the oblivion of the Early Welsh texts. She is the daughter of the Powysian king, Gorfyddyd. Cornwell's Ceinwyn is based on a saint, St Keyne, also rendered as Ceinwen (meaning 'fair and beautiful' in Welsh). She was of royal stock; her father was king Brychan Brycheiniog, the founder of the medieval kingdom of Brycheiniog, which later evolved into the county of Brecon (south Wales).

As a princess, Cornwell's Ceinwyn was considered a kind of barter in her father's businesses and affairs, an idea which reflects the situation in the Middle Ages. As Pennar states: "Intermarriage between the Welsh princely houses was very common. Women often became important links between one dynasty and another" (1976: 27). She has been betrothed four times to four different princes (one of them being Arthur himself) and three times the bridegroom has failed to keep his promise to marry her. It is the fourth time that she stands Lancelot up and decides to elope with Derfel. She chooses to learn the common and daily chores of household, such as cooking or weaving.

However, this should not lead us to erroneous conclusions about her: Ceinwyn has made up her mind and she is determined to follow her own resolutions, as she plainly tells Derfel: "I already knew I didn't want to belong to any man. I've belonged to men all my life [...] I will love you," she promised me, looking up into my face, "but I will not be any man's possession" (Cornwell, 1997: 71). Indeed, she does so: they have three daughters and spend their lives together until she dies of a fever. Since she makes up her own mind, we can state that Ceinwyn is a new Dame Regnell who wants her independence.

Finally, Nimue is the devilish woman in the trilogy. As a druidess, she is obsessed with restoring the Old Pagan gods at all costs. She is Derfel's close friend and first lover, and one of the characters most positively described at the beginning. Notwithstanding, she is also a bit intimidating from the very first descriptions. During a visit by King Gundleus of Siluria to Merlin's Tor, she welcomes him

naked and her thin white body was raddled with blood that had dripped down from her hair to run in rivulets past her small breasts and to their thighs. Her head was crowned with a death-mask, the tanned face-skin of a sacrificed man that has perched above her own face like a snarling helmet and held in place by the skin of the dead man's arms knotted about her neck [...] while in her hands she had two vipers (Cornwell, 1996: 34).

One of the reasons why she can be considered the example of the devilish woman is her extremism, to the extent of not only letting others suffer, but putting herself through all sorts of ordeals which, according to her, will put her in direct contact with the gods. In her aim to become the perfect druidess, Nimue has to suffer what she calls the "Three Wounds": to the Body, to the Pride and to the Mind. According to her, only a person receiving the Three Wounds can be in direct contact with the Gods: "Merlin has suffered all three, and that is why he's such a wise man. Morgan had the worst wound to the Body that anyone can imagine, but she never suffered the other two wounds" (Cornwell, 1996: 43). Nimue indeed undergoes all the three experiences: while she is being raped by King Gundleus of Siluria, one of her eyes is gouged out. To these two wounds, Nimue adds the one to the mind when forced to exile on the Isle of the Dead, a place to where mad people, criminals and all the marginals were sent, and from which Derfel rescues her.

In another interesting twist to the medieval plot, Nimue will also do away with Merlin. In Cornwell's trilogy, the druidess needs to know all the spells and enchantments from Merlin in order to restore the old gods, for which she will imprison him. The bard Taliesin tells Derfel of a dream that Merlin has sent him: "I talked to him in the dream, but he could not hear me. What that tells me, I think, is that he cannot be reached [...] But he wants help, that I do know, for he sent me the dream [...] The wood, I think, tells me that Merlin is imprisoned". Derfel immediately mentions a name: Nimue, "for I could think of no one else who would dare challenge the Druid" (Cornwell, 1998: 351).

This idea mirrors the medieval tale in which Merlin is imprisoned by a woman with whom he is in love or by whom he has been deceived, as in Malory's text. The parallelism runs further when Derfel implies that Nimue is getting all his knowledge after seducing and locking him up: "She despises him because he failed, and she believes that he conceals knowledge from her, and so even now, Lord, in this very wind, she is forcing Merlin's

secrets from him [...] It might take months or years for her to learn all she needs, but she will learn, Lord, and when she knows, she will use the power” (Cornwell, 1998: 353). Malory’s wording was different, but Nénive’s aims and her results are the same:

Merlin went with her evermore wheresoever she yede, and oftentimes Merlin would have her privily away by his subtle crafts. Then she made him to swear that she would never do no enchantment upon her if he would have his will, and he swore [...] And so on a time Merlin did show her in a rock [...] she made Merlin to go under that stone to let her wit of the marvels there, but she wrought so there for him that he came never out for all the craft he could do. And so she departed and left Merlin (Malory, 1998: 58-9).

However, there are differences between Malory’s Nénive and Cornwell’s Nimue. Nénive imprisons Merlin because of his tricks and because he is the son of an incubus. Malory’s text shows a strong Christian nuance that Cornwell’s lacks. In fact, in his narration, Malory wrote that she “was afraid of him for cause he was a devil’s son” (1998: 59). On the other hand, Cornwell’s Nimue plots against Merlin for rather personal reasons: her ambition for the wizard’s knowledge and the restoration of the ancient gods in the British Isles. The druidess thinks that Merlin is a weak man, for he refused to kill some innocents in a rite that, if completed, would have ridged the British Isles of the Christian influence. Nimue sacrifices Gawain, but Merlin refuses to kill Arthur and his son, among others. She behaves brutally with the wizard: she removes his eyes and lets him go mad while imprisoned, as an ironic twist to the “Three Wounds”.

#### **4. The female characters and religion**

One more thing remains to be said about the female characters in Cornwell’s trilogy. Even though they are more independent than those in the medieval texts, think for themselves and make their own decisions, they are, nonetheless, in the middle of a turmoil which will surround them: religion. Cornwell’s trilogy revolves around four religious creeds which fight each other. One of the main theses in the trilogy is that religion divided the Welsh kingdoms which, subsequently, brought the Saxon victory. This is not a new idea; scholars such as Morris or Snyder had already dealt with it.

However, Cornwell's skill lies in the way in which he involves women in this religious strife.

Morgan's change of religion is a hint at the final victory of Christianity, which defeated the native Celtic religion using the latter's own beliefs, weapons and means. Pope Gregory I forbade all the Christian missionaries in Ireland to destroy the pagan sites of worship. He insisted that they should be converted into Christian sites: the waters (wells, lakes, springs), venerated by the Celts, who thought that the Goddess Mother lived in them, became prominent Christian shrines in Ireland. Even Saint Patrick, in a contest against some Irish Druids, resorted to druidic tricks in order to win. Likewise, Morgan will perform her last druidic act (when she is already a devout Christian) to counteract one of Nimue's spells. It symbolizes the final triumph of Christianity over Paganism in the trilogy.

Christian ideas will also influence Nimue in her defence of Pagan religion. A clear example is at the High Council at Glevum. Sansum, a rising Christian star, uses the ideas expressed in *De ruina et conquestu Britanniae*, where Gildas deemed the Saxon invasion as a divine punishment for the sins of the Celts. The idea ultimately derives from Jeremiah's prophecies and his diatribe against the people of Israel. In a speech with many political undertones, Sansum defends that only a Christian union will defeat the Saxons. Indeed, he states that there "might be few Druids left in Britain, yet in every valley and farmland there were men and women who acted like Druids, who sacrificed living things to dead stone and who used charms and amulets to beguile the simple people" (Cornwell, 1996: 56).

Nimue, for her part, uses similar ideas to attack the Christians but, at the same time, foresees the Celtic collapse: "We will be abandoned by the Gods and left to the brutes. And those fools in there, the Mouse Lord and his followers, will ruin that chance unless we fight them. And there are so many of them and so few of us" (Cornwell, 1996: 57). Until the very end of the trilogy, the four characters represent different attitudes towards Christian religion. Nimue totally opposes it. Morgan becomes a dangerous fanatic, while Ceinwyn shows a certain indifference and Guinevere — deep scorn.

It is interesting to point out that Ceinwyn and Guinevere are the two most feminist characters in the trilogy and, at the same time, the least influenced by any formal religious creed. Nimue, no matter how independent she is, needs Merlin to bring the Celtic Gods back to the British Isles. Besides, her constant opposition to the Christian creed ironically and subtly

influences her, as it happens when using the same Christian arguments to lament the state of the British Isles.

## 5. Conclusion

Cornwell has broken the boundaries of Arthuriana: firstly, by including four women at the centre of the political plot. Secondly, by dealing with other characters that, in previous Arthurian literature, would have been inconceivable, even in the most belligerent texts (where we read of a horrendous green giant who picks up his head after being beheaded and leaves Arthur's court as if nothing had happened or we get to know of the tremendous gushes and wounds that the knights inflict upon each other).

Cornwell has introduced a woman whose left-hand side part of the body is totally charred, a gay bishop who marries a woman so that he can become more influential in politics, a score of dwarves and deformed characters (Mordred among them) or a filthy druidess, to mention but a few. Even when we dare to contradict Aristotle's thoughts, none of the female characters in this trilogy, lacks any of the man's qualities. Does this make Cornwell's trilogy imperfect? It is quite clear that it does not.

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# A THIRTEENTH CENTURY MEDITATIONAL TOOL: MATTHEW PARIS'S ITINERARY MAPS

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**Abstract:** *This paper looks into the way in which Matthew Paris's itinerary maps served as prompts for cloistered monastics to conduct imagined pilgrimages to Jerusalem, the centre of Christianity. Moreover, this paper aims at discussing the relationship between different potential types of users: viewers/readers/travelers and the itineraries at hand.*

**Keywords:** *meditation, orientation, pilgrimage, spatiality.*

## 1. Introduction

Matthew Paris was a thirteenth century Benedictine monk who lived at the abbey of Saint Albans and became the abbey's official recorder of events upon the death of Roger of Wendover, the abbey's former chronicler. His work as a historian and hagiographer consists of a history of the English people (*Historia Anglorum*), two *Lives* (one of the King Offa, the legendary founder of St. Albans and the other of Saint Edward the Confessor) and the more widely known *Chronica majora*, a massive account of events starting with the Creation and reaching up to year 1259 when Matthew died. The first seven pages prefacing Matthew Paris's *Chronica majora* make up a kind of medieval road map linking London to the most important centres of medieval pilgrimage in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Rome and Jerusalem.

In order to understand how these maps may have worked, it is important to look into the quality and structure of the design, exquisitely original for the period under research. Unlike medieval world maps, which were primarily concerned with representing a symbolic and theological conception of space, a fully comprehensive and highly elaborate image of the earth captured from a bird's eye view (i.e. the viewer is looking down at the disk of the world contemplating it from above), itinerary maps reduced the

scope of representation to a privileged number of routes and destinations selected by the mapmaker and activated by the onlooker, who was invited to move through the delineated territory place by place, along the indicated routes. Geography was organised as a journey, a linear movement through space, a steady progression through diverse locations, all arranged in set order. Thus, the itinerary interwove time and topography, 'space' becoming inseparable from the action of moving through it.

## 2. Itinerary maps and imaginary journeys

In contrast with the highly complex and dense design of thirteenth century *mappae mundi*, a multi-layered cumulation of geographical knowledge and natural curiosities, of historical events and legendary occurrences, all imbued with the richness of the Christian biblical tradition, Matthew Paris's itinerary maps are roughly schematic and seemingly deficient. The scarcity of information or detail was possibly hinting at enhancing orientation and focalizing attention on the aim of the imaginary journey: recollection and meditation on the Celestial City of God. Abrupt changes in orientation, difficult path-finding, as well as overfilling the space of representation with unnecessary and distracting 'ornaments', would not only tire and perplex the perusing eye of the viewer, but also dam the flow (*ductus*) of meditation, put the mind 'off its track', and eventually prevent it from achieving its goal (*skopos*).

According to Mary Carruthers (2000: 82), the great vice of *memoria* was believed to be disorder, not forgetting. A random disposition of images or a crowded 'scene' could easily lead the mind astray, block the meditational 'way' or dissipate the effectiveness of the mnemonic exercise. Cassian (2000: 125-126) warned that the human mind is by nature inclined to 'lukewarmness' and laziness, tempted to diverge from the set route, always 'light and wandering':

Since the mind which every moment wanders off vaguely, when it is brought back to the fear of God or spiritual contemplation, before it is established in it, darts off and strays; and when we have been roused and have discovered that it has wandered from the purpose set before it, and want to recall it to the meditation form which it has strayed, and to bind it fast with the firmest purpose of heart, as if with chains, while we are making the attempt it slips away from the inmost recesses of the heart swifter than a snake (Cassian, 2000: 187).



Therefore, due to its shortcomings, to its versatile nature and fickleness, the human mind must be constantly disciplined and trained to focus on the established course of spiritual meditation and on the goal awaiting at the end of the road. Consequently, an itinerary map superinfused with stopping places and details about them, crisscrossed by intersecting lines which open new alternative routes and direct the mind on roundabout ways, would not help a distracted mind keep to its path and would certainly fail to be an efficient meditational tool. In this respect, Suzanne Lewis is wrong in affirming that “Matthew’s maps (...) contain *surprisingly* few biblical, classical, and legendary features” (1987: 323, my emphasis).

Paris’s maps prefacing his *Chronica majora* are not world maps. Their purpose is not to present the viewer with a bulky amount of wildly assorted information, but rather to take the viewer by the hand (*manuductio*) and together indulge in a memorable journey of pious recollection and mystical contemplation. Perhaps the figure of the cowled monk looking out at the viewer as he steers his boat into the harbour of Acre — the monk is the only figure to visually engage the viewer and make eye contact with him — and the forefront image of the empty boat emblazoned with the shield of the Angevin kings approaching the coast of Palestine at the same time may represent an invitation for a fellow English monk-pilgrim to join the ‘expedition’. It could also simply testify to the success of the attempt: reaching the Land of the Lord.

Likewise, the small, visually entreating figure may stand metonymically for all the monastic brethren who would make use of the itineraries to *conduct* imagined pilgrimages to the Holy Land. It could, just as well, only contrast the numerous adventurers represented in the background, while approaching the harbour in crowded boats and galleys. No matter the reason, the presence of the journeying monk manages to strengthen the belief that each of Matthew’s maps is, in Michel de Certeau’s words, “a memorandum prescribing actions” (1984: 120).

The itinerary first invites the viewer to familiarize himself with the structure of the design and with the direction of movement. The body of the viewer, ‘absorbed’ in the structure of the graphic texture, is impelled to move upwards, following a straight vertical path which leads to the top of the itinerary-page, then resume its journey from the bottom of the parallel right column, again vertically and upwards, passing through a small number of locations carefully selected by the mapmaker. The stereotypical move-

ment upwards and away from the point of departure creates a pattern of *conduct* which habituates the journeying mind with the course and recurrence of the travelling action by giving it orientation and tempo.

Both elements of the pictorial composition are textually constructed. From the beginning, the routes insist on the reader's movement *vers orient*, when an alternate route is given. In the case of the indirect route from Reims to Châlons-sur-Marne, for example, the peripheral path is defined in terms of the initial orientation: *de vers orient par autre chemin*. Likewise, travel times connect the cities and the road which leads to them is expressed in days' journey.

Actually, the road is written time and the action of reading transports the body of the viewer forward through the movement of the eye and the power of imagination. Moreover, in order to render the idea of cadenced progress visible and amplify the sensation of movement, Matthew even deployed a calligraphic strategy of stretching out the letters of the word *journee* (*ju~r~r~r~n~ee*). By textualizing both orientation and time, the monastic viewer is further invited to 'read' the itinerary and, in doing so, to memorize its landmarks and cue them for contemplative recollection.

### 3. Alternative spaces, alternating shapes

The first day's journey (*journee*) would take the 'armchair' pilgrim from London, "the likely stopover on just about any trip from St. Albans" (Connolly, 1999: 607) to Rochester. The fact that the journey begins in London, — not in St. Albans, as everybody would expect —, is believed to signify from the very beginning the desire to travel, to be elsewhere. In addition, the two mixed views of the city (the aerial and the profile) seem to indicate the existence of two different viewers 'working' in tandem: the monk who bends over the manuscript and looks at the itinerary on vellum from above and the 'travelling' monk, who sees the city of London from ground level, while approaching its high crenelated walls from the north — the direction of St. Albans, as Connolly suggests.

The mixed vantage points of London may also determine Matthew to change the shape of the represented city from the more conventional medieval square (as in the case of the city of Jerusalem) to an oval shape. If we compare the way in which the two cities corresponding to the starting point (*terminus a quo*) and the terminal point (*terminus ad quem*) of the

journey are sketched, we will notice the difference between the elliptical plan of London and the rigid angular shape of Jerusalem.

London's stretched oval shape, embracing the entire width of the passage with its curving Roman wall punctuated by gates, stands for an extra invitation addressed to the monk to permeate both the ideal border separating the real world from the imaginary (i.e. the line which separates the body of the viewer from the edge of the manuscript sheet) and the figurative or 'representational' space of the composition. Once open, the gates in London's wall introduce the viewer into an alternative space, governed not so much by a set of rules different from those of the claustral (since the principles of order, discipline and conformation apply here too) but by a combination of rigour and permissiveness, of watchfulness and vision.

The dual passage which takes the 'travelling' mind from London to Italy, dividing the first four pages of the manuscript in two halves, together with the alternative routes which encourage the viewer to move away from the trodden path (i.e. the central route), seek new travelling possibilities and discover other intermediate destinations, are all artifices indicative of a contrastive, double-fold approach to the design. Connolly remarks that "the double passage laid down in each page narrows the possible space for movement and at the same time maintains a tension that creates that space" (1999: 606). The 'space' Connolly refers to is not simply the technical 'space' of the design. It is rather 'spatiality', a competition between the limited and prohibitive framing of the itinerary design and the open, incentive space of the human mind.

By contrast, the city of Jerusalem is represented as a square, walled city marked by four corner towers and a pair of gates in the middle of each side. The image is grounded in the description of the Heavenly Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation: "And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal" (Revelation 21:16). The square, the circle, the sphere and the cube were regarded, due to their geometric harmony, as reproductions of the divine model, which made it essential that they be applied in architecture as well as in architectural representations. Harmony was given by the radial symmetry which these forms engendered. The existence of a central point from which they equally radiate on all sides made these elementary forms the site of perfection.

For a Benedictine monk, the square was a familiar shape. The usual plan of a monastery consisted in a square (sometimes rectangular) cloister, enclosed by buildings on all sides. The cloister was at the heart of each and every monastery: it was the place where the monks worked, taught, walked and meditated. Consequently, the privacy of the cloister was carefully guarded, for nobody was allowed to disturb the monks “while they were at their books” (Friar, 2007: 90). The space of the monastic cloister had been successfully duplicated in the plan and structure of non-monastic cathedrals, i.e. cathedrals that were not served by monks but by secular canons. Strictly speaking, a cloister was not required in a cathedral because, unlike monks who were obliged by the vow of stability they had taken to live in a closed community, the canons of a medieval cathedral could live outside the perimeter of the confining area and often chose to do so.

Without the imperative of a secluded community, it is surprising that cloisters were built at many non-monastic cathedrals. For this reason, it is difficult to establish the function they had in these cathedrals. Alec Clifton-Taylor believes that the only purpose they could have served was the processional which explains, in his opinion, “why at some of these [cathedrals], such as Wells and Chichester, the cloister walk adjacent to the nave was omitted” (1967: 136). However, due to the fact that medieval cathedrals were important centres of learning, the cloisters could also have been intended for teaching and individual study. Or else, they could have been used by canons and other members of the clergy involved in the daily worship of the cathedral as peaceful places of reflection and inter-service recess. Two wonderful examples of perfectly square cloisters are to be found in the cathedrals of Salisbury and Gloucester (a former Benedictine abbey).

Going back to Matthew’s representation of the city of Jerusalem, one will notice the formal treatment given to the biblical city of God, which is not only sketched according to John’s vision in the Book of Revelation but also inscribed in Latin, unlike the rest of the itinerary, which is in Old French. The radical shift to the more profound Latin language in both the city’s inscription and the city’s legends denotes a strict, even scrupulous, observance of theological and ideological prescripts and a desire to counterpoise the ‘overindulgent’ and ‘permissive’ representation of the city of London to the canonical and rigorous image of Jerusalem. The square plan of the city, with its roughly sketched landmarks (the Holy Sepulchre in the southwest cor-

ner, the Temple of Solomon in the southeast corner, the Dome of the Rock in the opposite corner) does not aim to create a simple mnemonic frame, but rather a structure which can be easily reproduced out of its original context by using the power of imagination.

We can imagine how a monk, strolling along the ambulatory passageways of the cloister into the cloister garth, could easily recreate the plan of Jerusalem and meditate upon its vestiges while moving from one corner of the enclosure to the other. Within the secluded space of the cloister, he could further activate his memory of the earthly Jerusalem, rehearse his entry into the Holy City, and await the fulfilment of the apocalyptic prophesy. Yet, until the time of rejoicing in God's presence had come, monks would continue to practise their imaginary pilgrimages and meditate on the transience of the human condition (*homo viator*).

#### 4. Sacred itineraries and pilgrimage sites

Matthew's itinerary was constantly reminding of that. Once activated, the maps compelled the viewer to move forward, the design admitted no deflection or reversal, but drove the eye and imagination insistently forward. In this line, Connolly remarks that:

Beginning with London, and throughout the map's entirety, the design of these pages continually constructs movement away from the viewer, first toward Dover at the top edge of the codex, the horizon for that strip's journey, and then retracing the surface of the vellum, like a capital N, to return to the body at the base of the right-hand column (1999: 608).

Apart from being convenient staging posts along the way to Jerusalem, the towns which Matthew included in his maps were also reading breaks which allowed the viewer to interrupt his imaginary journey and take it up again from the exact point at which it had been stopped. Besides, they functioned as key markers to assess the pilgrim's 'bodily' progression through space and, as many of them were also goal pilgrimages in their own right, they stimulated a cumulative spiritual experience "where each place depicted could be viewed as one more marker of the larger theme of movement toward the centre of Christian sacrality, Jerusalem and the Holy Sepulchre" (Connolly, 1999: 608). Rochester, which housed the shrines of St. Paulinus and St. Ithamar (early seventh century bishops) as well as that

of the more popular William of Perth (a murdered Scottish pilgrim who died around the beginning of the thirteenth century and was interred in the cathedral), even though mentioned only for its castle, was an important place of pilgrimage at the time.

Its celebrity was of course overshadowed by the more famous Canterbury (*chef des iglises dengleterre*), represented as a walled town with a high watchtower and two double gates which disclosed to the viewer standing outside its bulwarks the thin, gracious triple-towered silhouette of Christ Church. The rise of Thomas Becket's cult in the late twelfth century, which boosted the cathedral's revenue and consolidated its renowned fame, turned Canterbury into a conventional destination for pilgrims of all kinds. Several medieval reports attest to the vitality of the cult and to the pomp and luxury associated with it. The description given by a Venetian traveller at the end of the Middle Ages confirms the magnificence of the shrine, which reminds one both of the splendour of the Heavenly Jerusalem and of the opulence exhibited in the great palace of Prester John in the city of Sussa:

Notwithstanding its great size it is covered with plates of pure gold; yet the gold is scarcely seen from the various precious stones with which it is studded, as sapphires, balasses, diamonds, rubies, and emeralds; and wherever the eye turns something more beautiful than the rest is observed. Nor, in addition to these natural beauties, is the skill of art wanting, for in the midst of the gold are the most beautiful sculptured gems, both small and large, as well as are in relief, as agates, onyxes, cornelians and cameos, and some cameos are of such size that I am afraid to name it; but everything is far surpassed by a ruby, not larger than a thumbnail, which is set to the right of the altar (Loxton, 1978: 183).

The itinerary through France reveals the presence of other important centres of pilgrimage. Reims, for example, can be considered a French equivalent to England's Canterbury, not only for the pre-eminence of its Archbishop over his ecclesiastical peers, but also for his key political role in the consecration of the kings of the realm. The early Capetian kings of France established a tradition of going to the Cathedral of Reims to be crowned and anointed. The practice was nourished by the legend of the unction of Clovis by St. Remigius (bishop of Reims in the sixth century) with oil brought about by a dove (immediately identified as the Holy Spirit). The

holy flask was itself a highly-prized relic because of its strong association with the Holy Trinity.

Continuing along the main route, one will discover the even more famous town of St. Denis, surrounded by a crenelated wall, now a northern suburb of Paris. The town was particularly well-known for its Abbey, which had been enveloped in an aura of legendary mystique over centuries. The core of Saint-Denis Abbey was the tomb of Dionysius (also known as St. Denis, the patron saint of France), a missionary martyred in the third century and acknowledged by the Merovingian king Dagobert as the founder of the abbey, although the first church was built nearly two hundred years later.

A ninth-century biography of the saint assimilated him with two other Dionysius figures: the Areopagite mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles and the Pseudo-Areopagite, the fifth-century mystic and author of the *Celestial Hierarchies*. Here, too, the tomb was reminiscent of the splendour of the New Jerusalem from the Book of Revelation, due to its marvellous combination of exquisite artistry and mounted gems. The embellishment of the shrine, possibly carried out by Eligius, Dagobert's treasurer and goldsmith, is fully described in *The Life of Saint Eligius*:

Above all, Eligius fabricated a mausoleum for the holy martyr Denis in the city of Paris with a wonderful marble ciborium over it marvellously decorated with gold and gems. He composed a crest [at the top of a tomb] and a magnificent frontal and surrounded the throne of the altar with golden axes in a circle. He placed golden apples there, round and jewelled. He made a pulpit and a gate of silver and a roof for the throne of the altar on silver axes. He made a covering in the place before the tomb and fabricated an outside altar at the feet of the holy martyr. So much industry did he lavish there, at the king's request, and poured out so much that scarcely a single ornament was left in Gaul and it is the greatest wonder of all to this very day (<http://www.fordham.edu/HALSALL/basis/eligius.html>).

The peripheral routes of the itinerary also site major religious centres, among which Chartres and Vézelay. The first was known as the most important Marian shrine during the Middle Ages, although this allegation is now considered controversial and therefore open to dispute. The claim, as James Bugslag observes, was first made by the anonymous author of a thirteenth-century miracle collection from Chartres, who stated that the Virgin

had chosen the town's cathedral "to be her special dwelling place on earth" (2005: 136).

This somehow explains the inflation of relics which poured towards Chartres, the most important of all being the virgin's Holy Tunic (*sancta camisa*), a highly revered relic which had been brought from Constantinople and offered to Chartres in the ninth century. An equal fame brought the remains (bones) of Mary Magdalene to Vézelay. In the middle of the twelfth century, Vézelay was a key point in the network of both devout and armed pilgrimages. One of the routes to Santiago de Compostella started from it and, in 1146, Bernard of Clairvaux preached the Second Crusade in front of the basilica which housed the relics of that who was the first to witness Christ's Resurrection.

On the whole, by bringing into visual proximity towns and pilgrimage sites that are not otherwise close by, Matthew Paris creates a unitary, homogeneous space, the principal factor of cohesion being given by the sacred energy imbued into the world. Like the holy bodies of saints, which anchored sacredness to the churches which preserved their relics, cathedral towns and pilgrimage destinations expanded the territory of the sacred by capitalizing on their architectural icons: monasteries, abbeys and cathedrals. As Emile Durkheim points out, "far from remaining attached to the things that are marked with it, sacredness possessed a certain transience" (2001: 52). In other words, sacredness was considered to be a floating quality, not stagnant or residual, but rather fluid and protean.

The St. Albans monk looking at the itinerary lying before his eyes, contemplating the cities spread on vellum and meditating on the places made sacred by the possession of relics, must have felt that the road to Jerusalem was his *via sacra*, that the stages of pilgrimage toward the Holy City were generating a flux of sacrality which gradually filled the interstices of the map and propelled the contemplating mind forward to the final station of the journey (*skopos*) and the fountain of all sacredness. Once in Jerusalem, instilled by the progressive contact with the sacred experienced along the way and inspired by the recollection of the richness and magnificence of the places 'visited', the travelling mind could finally activate these memories and re-direct them toward composing a vision of the future Heavenly City faithful to the apocalyptic. This mental picture of the Promised Land would represent the zenith of the visual experience and the culmination of the imaginary pilgrimage.



## 5. Conclusion

To conclude, Matthew Paris's itinerary maps construct a highly performative and functional space (mainly as meditational tools), which contrasts the commoner, static, treasury-like space of thirteenth century *mappae mundi*. The maps addressed different types of viewers/readers/travellers and, although it is difficult to establish the exact audience targeted by the author, we can reasonably affirm the primacy of cloistered monastics over other categories of users. To the secluded monk, the itineraries offered the possibility of embarking upon an imaginary journey to Jerusalem and, by contemplating the geometrically sketched image of the earthly City of Man, evolving into focused meditations on the apocalyptic City of God.

To the lay or non-monastic viewer, Paris's maps were just an invitation to explore the world of God and decipher its sacred meanings. Since relatively few people during the Middle Ages could make a physical pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the roads of Christendom were guiding the faithful to the gates of Gothic abbeys and cathedrals, themselves replicas of the Heavenly Jerusalem.

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# CONSTRUCTION AND DECONSTRUCTION OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

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**Abstract:** *The paper traces the American dream as the core of American mythology, underpinning the experiment of achieving a dreamland. There is more than one American dream to consider, as it has taken many shapes since the ‘invention’ of the ‘New World’. Therefore, the American myth is undercut by an inherent self-deconstructive proclivity from the beginning.*

**Keywords:** *American dream, colonial, deconstruction, myth, narrative.*

*“The Republic is a dream. Nothing happens unless first a dream.”*

Carl Sandburg, *Washington Monument by Night*

## 1. Introduction

The “American dream” is a significant metaphor, which may be construed as the nerve centre of American civilization. This foundation myth is the theoretical underpinning of the experiment to see whether a perfect society can be achieved. As a mark of boundless creative energy and resourcefulness, the “American dream” is the idea which perhaps best reflects the meaning of the American myth. The present paper traces, in a diachronic approach, the evolution of this founder myth from its early construction up to its latter-day breakdown, in order to reveal the fact that it significantly changes content. My major surmise is that the “idea” of America, which resulted in the creation of an extensive mythology around America, was essentially constructed as a dream.

In this context, my aim is to address the idea of “America” as forged by the American dream narrative and to expose its inherent flaws. Considering that the construction of the myth begins with the “discovery” of America,

the incipient American dream ought to be traced outside the limits imposed by the definition later given to it. For this purpose, the American dream is an indispensable notion in the process of creating or imagining America as a dream land.

## 2. The 'Invention' of America

Historian James Truslow Adams was the first to use the phrase "American Dream" in *The Epic of America* in 1931. He defined it as

that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement ... It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position (Adams, 1969: 214).

Despite the fact that the American dream has often been attacked as primarily material, Adams gave it a much broader understanding. Thus, even though the pursuit of material plenty was among its facets, it essentially referred to the belief Americans share that they can forge destiny for themselves. Settlers, colonists and frontiersmen who migrated westwards were determined to find happiness in the wilderness by pursuing that dream. It sustained the colonists' "errand into the wilderness" and later impelled Americans to strive for a better society (cf. Queen ed., 1982: 26). It is in this sense that Adams considered America the unique noble experiment, underpinned by the American dream.

Nonetheless, the dream itself had started long before Truslow popularized it and made it America's bedrock. It may be argued that the American dream actually started in the age of conquest and discovery and that it paradoxically took the form of a European dream. Most authors agree that the Dream had started before it was literally formulated by Adams, but they associate it with the Pilgrims' vision of a "City upon a Hill". On the contrary, I deem the latter as a second instance of the American dream which had brought conquistadors to the New World in the first place.

The question Edmundo O'Gorman (1961) asks in his *Invention of America*, "When and how does America appear in historical conscious-

ness?”, helps define the central idea of this paper. It is imperative to distinguish among invention, discovery and conquest, the latter being a variety of the former, while we cannot rightfully speak about the “discovery” of America. O’Gorman examines the ontological attempt of defining America as lived by Christopher Columbus and presented in his journal. It becomes apparent that Columbus did not literally discover America, but rather constructed an imaginative world, according to the earliest variant of an “American dream”. Building on Renaissance fantasy and European ideologies of the time, he fancied he had discovered the earthly paradise. The fact that Columbus was convinced that he had reached Asia, as anticipated, is yet another proof of his flawed perception of the “new” world, which was new to him only.

Not only did Columbus believe that America was elsewhere, but his description of its inhabitants he named “Indians” was inconsistent, too. He claimed to have discovered cannibals, Cyclops, dog-faced peoples and people with tails, as he confesses in his diary and letters (cf. Cecil, 1989: 198-200). The “Indians” he described and the exoticism he encountered only confirmed his faulty belief. The Indian was not discovered as “other”, but assimilated within the European categories of the alien or the exotic. Therefore, from a Eurocentric point of view, the invention of America meant that America was invented in the likeness of Europe and not understood in itself. Hermeneutic constructions of the New World were designed by pre-existent standards, as the discovery/ invention occurred under European terms of reference.

Thus, the construction of America as “invention” rather than discovery is fundamental to understanding the nascent idea of America. In *Marvelous Possessions. The Wonder of the New World*, Stephen Greenblatt (1991) refers to this construction as ‘the imagination at work’ or ‘practical imagination’. Invention or American dream myth-making is contrasted to a truthful representation of America, a distinction used to expose the reality of America. Greenblatt examines the early discourse of discovery as “a superbly powerful register of the characteristic claims and limits of European representational practice” (1991: 23). This colonial discourse exemplifies the difficulties of establishing contact between two systems of representation. In denying notions of reciprocity, the colonizers merely “project vain fantasies” (Greenblatt, 1991: 117). Thus, the encounter with otherness takes place within the cultural code imposed by the ‘discoverers’.

In order to legitimate conquest, Europeans portrayed themselves as missionaries of civilization to the barbarian world. Similarly, a century later, Pioneers would continue the process of domesticating alien territory by integrating their quest in the scheme of national destiny and confirming the idea of mission. Thus, “self-made” Puritans and Pilgrims ventured into what they considered wilderness, inspired by the enterprise of inventing their dream land.

### **3. Self-legitimizing reinventions**

Myriad optimistic discourses are illustrative of the Puritan settlers' and other 17<sup>th</sup> century pioneers' American dreams and fantasies. These narratives conjure up a series of metaphors related to American dream mythology. For instance, America is envisioned as “the land of all opportunities”, Paradise or Garden of Eden, “chosen land”, “new Jerusalem” or “asylum of the world”. Thus, the Puritans' dream, animated by great hopes, started as a set of high ideals and moral purpose, with their vision of — in Bradford's words — a “city upon a hill for the whole world to look at” (cf. Pearce, 1965: 27).

Committed to the ideal of establishing a “city of God” on earth, the Puritans entertained such legitimating fantasies. This was primarily a vision of religious freedom, but also an ultimate experiment of social order and harmony. It could be achieved through a hard-work ethic, accompanied by self-reliance, thrift and other virtues. The Pilgrims and the Puritans thus shared a high moral purpose. “In the early days of colonization, every new settlement represented an idea and proclaimed a mission”. However, the colonization of 1800 loses this distinctive character and is “rarely illuminated by an idea” (Bradley, 1974: 616).

However, it is my contention that 17<sup>th</sup> century colonists, like their forebears, invented their own America or found there what they wanted to find, as their fabulous accounts illustrate. They made up a “New England” and a “New World” of the mind, in the guise of Mother England and Europe instead of discovering America's reality and encountering the “others” — Amerindians. Moreover, the pioneers' individualism and the cultivation of the acquisitive spirit finally led to the acceptance of material success as the highest accomplishment (cf. Queen ed., 1982: 25).

Their version of the American dream can be traced in early colonial literature, generally promotion literature, which was habitually camouflaged as travel writing or literature of exploration. Writers celebrated America's lures, the enchanting climate and conditions, the friendliness of its inhabitants and the profusion of uncultivated food. They amply exaggerated all of these aspects, as well as the possibility of wealth and countless other attractions America supposedly held in store. Even though most of the writings were sheer promotion materials advertising America to the newcomers, the themes and metaphors they contained have resulted in the American dream myth (cf. Lemay, 1988: 4).

The construction of American dream mythology continued with the Transcendentalists and the Founding Fathers of the republic in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The narrative of individual uplift is upheld by the founders of the Republic, as well as by the representatives of the Enlightenment. Using the same rhetoric of "the pursuit of happiness", they espoused a philosophy of self-improvement central to the myth under discussion. Accordingly, they enacted the Puritan legacy of moral improvement by enhancing the American dream myth in moral terms (cf. Sanford, 1961: 117). However, Franklin would soon elevate upward mobility into an American creed, which adds to the material side of the American dream (cf. Vaughan, 1983: 37). It is until late 19<sup>th</sup> century that American imagination would still be inspired by their unrelenting optimism and the belief in the nation's millennial destiny.

Thus, the basic formulation of the American dream emerged as an ideal devised by the Founding Fathers in the eve of the Revolution. Their vision of a society in which all people are dignified and regarded as equals is the engaging fantasy at the heart of the American creed. Therefore, the Declaration of Independence is regarded as the groundwork of the American dream: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by God, Creator, with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness". The universal scope of these words encompasses all races, all religions and all walks of life, purportedly benefiting equal rights in a land of the free. It is generally agreed that the prominent values which buttress the American dream are the notions of equality and freedom. These are the core beliefs ingrained within the dream that America unswervingly fol-

lowed for two centuries and a half. The pursuit of happiness and the ideal of living in human dignity added more idealism to the national myth.

Ever since the founding fathers of the nation envisioned this brilliant dream, America has struggled to profess the creed it has inherited. This vision lived on since the early settlers' version, with many failings, revisions and reassertions. It probably reached climax at the momentous point of the American Revolution and independence. As late as the 1950's, Martin Luther King reaffirmed it in his notable speech before thousands still claiming equal civil rights. His dream too was "deeply rooted in the American dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed — we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal" (cf. Linkugel ed., 1969: 293). Such late reassertions of the dream indicate the fact that the dream was still denied to many Americans excluded from this narrative. Therefore, it becomes apparent that there is a distance between the founders' overstated dream rhetoric and reality (cf. Rather, 2001: 3). The disquieting issues that later arise will further allow for the inquiry whether the dream was indeed an ideal or a false promise.

#### **4. Deconstructions of the Dream**

All these discourses make a case for the idealism at the core of the American dream, turned into national creed and building on liberty, equality and opportunity. So far, the basic formulation of the American dream evokes the promised land of all opportunities, connoting a sense of vision. Gradually, though, the Dream becomes an ambiguous project, as more mundane aspects are added to it, triggering a conflict between the pursuit of wealth and the pursuit of righteousness.

Nonetheless, vulnerable to deconstruction, the American dream of the revolutionary age already gave way to misgivings and calls to reform. One aim of the Revolution was to reform the character of the American society. The confidence in the utopian Republican experiment was undermined by multiplying expressions of pessimism. The very high expectations of 1776 were undercut by discontent and disillusionment, as various sources — pamphlets, newspapers, sermons, correspondence — bear witness. Discontent was surprisingly rooted in prosperity rather than poverty, as reformers lamented the degeneracy it brought along. In the years following the Revolution, John Quincy Adams described "this critical period" when



“the whole country was groaning under the intolerable burden of ... accumulated evils” (Wood, 1993: 393/395).

As Americans explored the nature of their society, they soon discovered a sense of precariousness surfacing despite their abiding optimism. For this reason, Republicanism was also seen as a necessity and “republican remedies” were sought. Reformers and radicals already started to call for needful regeneration and the return to past temperance (cf. Wood, 1993: 97). The Republican myth rejected the old world of vice and corruption, which conflicted with American dreams and idealized expectations. At the same time, however, some of the pamphlets had already emphasized excesses and disorders in the forming American society. Public literature often indicted colonial acquisitiveness, consumption and greed. Corrosion was already menacing the colonies, which had become “carried away by the stream of prosperity” (Wood, 1993: 108-109).

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the post-industrial era, the material side of the American dream gains prominence, thus coming under attack. The dream appears battered and corrupted to many writers and cultural critics who express disillusionment and loss of hope. They conduct an indictment of capitalist society in a pessimistic tone most condemnatory of the entrenched materialism which dominates modernity. In capitalist culture, the initial adherence to an ideal degrades into a materialistic appetite for abundance. The obsession with economic growth and ‘upward mobility’ having become major ideals of capitalist society, the utopian ideal is irretrievably lost.

Tracing the myth further into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the breakdown of the American dream seems complete, given the major shifts in cultural values and representations which occur at the turn of the century. The rise of mass culture and consumerism, accompanied by the degradation of individualism as framed by the Puritans and the Founding Fathers, the degeneration of optimism into skepticism, all these factors imperil the endurance of the American dream. Contemporary critics are alarmed as to the cultural shifts they perceive and they signal a “moral breakdown”, a “crisis” or even a “culture war” (cf. Himmelfarb, 2001). The dream land Americans had created has turned into a dream they want to escape or even a nightmare (cf. Miller, 1970). That is why mass culture, especially entertainment, is escapist and thus illustrative of the above contention. By the same token, Christopher Lasch (1991) describes America as *The Culture of Narcissism and American*

*Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, completely deprived of its hopes and dreams. Narcissism appears as a form of self-indulgence in material well-being, as opposed to the pursuit of a long-lost ideal.

Accordingly, the deconstruction of the American dream narrative follows from its transformation from the 'pursuit of happiness' into the pursuit of wealth and material welfare. Conspicuously, the myth which founded America had contained the seeds of later conflict from the beginning. Not only did America feed on the idealism of the American dream, it also interpreted it so as to satisfy the acquisitive penchant that had driven great masses to the New World. The dream of creating the perfect society took many shapes and encapsulated paradoxical features, due to the confusion of idealistic and materialistic stances. I shall attempt to reveal in what way this resourceful dream will further change content.

Both construction and deconstruction are fuelled precisely by the American dream, the meaning of which is subverted. Thus, the very idea that has enhanced America's success also brings about its patent downfall. Deconstruction is also used as a methodological tool to expose the failings of the American dream, to look at the "Others" which have not been included within its range of meanings and to measure the distance between the founders' overstated dream rhetoric and the deceptive reality. Some of its critics dismiss the American dream as a futile and ineffective vision or a deceptive fantasy, especially with regard to those "huddled masses" which have been excluded from dreaming — natives, black Americans and poor immigrants. Critics have argued that the idealistic optimism American dream ideology is based upon is in utter disagreement with past American realities.

Moreover, the dream has also been deconstructed as the product of a white male European culture, relentlessly competitive and driven by a boundless appetite to expand Westward in its inexhaustible material pursuit. Ever since the conquest of America by European conquistadors in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, this Eurocentric penchant has undermined the American dream narrative, as Rabasa revealed in *Inventing America* (1993).

Finally, Jacques Derrida himself applied deconstruction to the concept and event called "9/11", which is one of the marks of America's conspicuous breakdown. The terrorists' intervention upon a significant American institution endowed with symbolic meaning entails massive consequences upon American hope and self-confidence. The specter of terrorism has

been haunting America ever since, undermining the promise of an optimistic future, which has long been upheld by the American dream mystique. September 11 has brought an abyss of terror by making people expect the worst in the interval to come (Borradori, 2005: 39).

Nonetheless, it is essential to note that the ultimate meaning of deconstruction is not destructive, but affirmative and restorative. As read by Derrida, deconstruction aims not to destroy or even deform the narrative it is applied to, but to reform and improve it. Deconstruction must be rightly understood as a type of intervention meant to destabilize the structural tenets of grand narratives or constructions. However, it is essentially spurred by a constructive penchant and by the need to expose the flaws of these artificial constructions. Far from being a mere *destruction*, a negative reduction, it is a reconstruction, as Derrida explains in *A Letter to a Japanese Friend* (1988: 1).

## 5. Conclusion

Therefore, the discussion brings us to the question whether the American dream has been entirely lost or can be restored. Revivalists are indefatigably obsessed with the possibilities of reinvention afforded by the American dream. Critics are increasingly concerned about restoring the American dream and revivalism recurrently surfaces in cultural discourse of late. This arguably serves to confirm the downfall of the dream or, perhaps, it leaves the debate open. However, the restoration rhetoric which abounds in all (non)academic quarters is indicative of the frantic attempt to rescue the imperiled dream.

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# DOES ECOCRITICISM REALLY MATTER? EXPLORING THE RELEVANCE OF GREEN CULTURAL STUDIES

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**Abstract:** *Ecocriticism has gained footing in the last decade, though it still fights for credibility. Is it not time to acknowledge a need for an ecologically conscious literary criticism? Will new fields like ecofeminism and economics soon emerge in response to climate change and global warming? This paper touches on the central issues and problems within the movement.*

**Keywords:** *ecocriticism, environmental criticism, environmental literature, green cultural studies.*

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, scientists have proven that climate change is real. Glaciers in Switzerland are receding, ice sheets in Antarctica are falling apart, and within a few short decades, the Northern ice cap will completely melt every summer. Politicians normally avoid the issue of the environment, as acknowledging a need for radical change means electoral doom. Evidence of climate change can already be seen. For humans, the consequences of climate change are far reaching. Third world countries will almost certainly undergo the worst problems, as they have the fewest resources to devote to environmental problems.

As Hurricane Katrina's destruction of New Orleans has shown, even large cities in the developed West, with complex and expensive defenses, are not immune to the destructive forces of nature. Scientists suggest that, if ice melt continues, sea levels will rise considerably in the coming decades. Cities like Amsterdam, New York City, Rio de Janeiro, and Shanghai will be permanently altered. The twenty-first century will likely be remembered not for the economic ascent of China and India. The twenty-first century will be known for environmental disorder, and the literal

redrawing of worldwide maps. Climate change will force us to reevaluate and realign academic disciplines in order to simply cope and survive.

### **2.1. A relatively recent development**

Ecocriticism has been growing over the last fifteen years. It remains a relatively young movement (Magee, 2002: 30). Professors who specialize in green cultural studies are being hired in modest numbers at North American, British, and Australian universities. Ecocriticism combines the historian's zeal for putting art into context with the ideological passion of Feminism or Marxism. Ecocriticism is also economically and politically informed. As a movement, ecocriticism has coalesced into a burgeoning school of literary criticism. Although the movement is maturing, it still has not received broad acceptance within the academy. As Lawrence Buell reminds us, "The challenge of professional legitimation... still has not been met, although the situation is changing slowly for the better" (2005: 129). Magee has gone further by suggesting that Ecocriticism is often pushed to the fringe, and argues that "the Academy still tends to marginalize Ecocriticism at times" (2002: 41). It is difficult to predict whether Ecocriticism as a movement will ultimately be successful insofar as appreciably affecting literary studies in the long term.

While many approaches to the study of literature focus on human society as the most central issue, Ecocriticism is unusual. As Glotfelty has argued, "In most literary theory 'the world' is synonymous with society — the social sphere. Ecocriticism expands the notion of 'the world' to include the entire ecosphere" (1994: online). The most important defining feature of Ecocriticism, then, is that it moves away from an anthropocentric view of the universe. Place is often seen as secondary or of limited importance in a given text. Ecocriticism seeks to put place at the center. The goal is to shed light on the complex cultural connections between the environment, culture, and art. As Buell argues, "Nature-responsiveness as a kind of culture, or rather counterculture, that one must pursue in resistance to the intractable homocentrism in terms of which one's psychological and social worlds are always to some degree mapped" (1995: 114).

### **2.2. An ideological approach**

Practitioners of Ecocriticism share a common vision of developing a new worldview based on nature. This, like other ideological movements

pressed onto literature, has a political agenda. Just as Marxism and Feminism reflect social concerns of class and gender, Ecocriticism echoes the current global environmental crisis. Marxism and Feminism seek to uncover evidence of class-consciousness or gender in a given text. Ecocritics, on the other hand, seek out *ecoconsciousness*. The lack of an authoritative definition of Ecocriticism indicates that the movement is still going through a teething process. If a definition is to be helpful, it needs to be broad enough to reach out to a very diverse pool of practitioners — teachers and professors from a number of different disciplines across national boundaries. At the same time, a satisfactory definition must not become so broad as to become general and trite.

Cheryl Glotfelty is a Professor at the University of Nevada, Reno. She was the first recognized professor of environmental literature in the United States. Glotfelty characterizes Ecocriticism as thematically engaged. She published *The Ecocriticism Reader* in 1996. In the book, Glotfelty uses Showalter's three stages of feminist criticism to make a similar framework for Ecocriticism. Glotfelty has described Ecocriticism as, "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (1996: xviii). Her definition was an important predecessor to contemporary notions of Ecocriticism.

Lawrence Buell is the best-regarded scholar currently working within the movement. He has pushed the movement much more into the theoretical, and, as a result, has brought Ecocriticism into a more respected position. Buell's *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005) has given Ecocriticism much needed exposure. Buell has defined Ecocriticism as, "[the] study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis" (1995: 430).

This description suggests a commitment not only to the investigation of literature, but also to environmental advocacy. Parallels can be drawn between Buell's definition and traditionally leftist approaches to the examination of literature and art. The concept of advocacy is an important distinction between the model of Ecocriticism as Lawrence Buell views it, and Glotfelty's less ideologically driven thematic description. While the pastoral might reasonably fall under Glotfelty's description of ecocritical literature, there is no place for passive bucolic sentimentalism in Buell's view.

While there have been previous attempts to view literature (and culture) through an environmental lens, Ecocriticism is a relatively young movement. The movement has assumed near subversive status, as Lawrence Buell has argued that “only in the last decade has the study of literature in relation to environment begun, quite suddenly, to assume the look of a major critical insurgency” (1999: 699).

Ecocriticism has been called by a number of terms including compost-structuralism, green cultural studies, and environmental criticism. Such diversity reveals the diversity of Ecocriticism’s practitioners. Ecocritics can be found not only in English and Literature departments, but also across all humanities’ departments, including women’s studies, history, and foreign languages. Ecocritics can be found in biology and science departments as well. The movement is open to cooperation with other fields of research.

### **2.3. Revaluation and reinterpretation**

What are the aims of the movement? Ecocriticism seeks to shed light on the relationships between culture and the environment. As Jean Arnold has argued, “nature and culture are mutually entangled in complex and inherently elusive ways” (1999: 1098). If academics are to break static molds of conventional literary examination, innovative models of analysis can highlight new connections between art and culture. Given enthusiasm for cultural studies, what makes Ecocriticism different? While cultural studies employ interdisciplinary techniques to fish out issues of cultural power, Ecocriticism seeks to uncover the cultural connections between humans and the environment. While power certainly plays a role in green studies, a primary focus of Ecocriticism is on environmental advocacy. The ultimate goal of Ecocriticism, then, is to examine the moral implications of human interaction with nature, in the hope of preserving a diminishing resource.

Imagine the following scenario: common working class people are slowly poisoned by an unsympathetic and profit-driven organization. While this could be the plotline of the 2000 film *Erin Brockovich*, a writer addressed these same issues decades ago. Many cite Rachel Carson’s 1962 *Silent Spring* as the start of the environmental movement in the United States. In the book, she documents the deadly effects of pesticides on the environment and on humans and animals. Carson’s source for the story was an article published in the *New York State Journal of Medicine* on May 15, 1959. The article, “Poisoning by Insecticide,” describes human suffering



because of contact with toxic chemicals. Carson's book was a daring rebuke of the chemical industries at a time when economic growth was seen as the best buttress against communism. Rachel Carson is frequently credited for helping provide Ecocriticism with its ideological passion.

#### **2.4. Intellectual lineage of the movement**

The intellectual genealogy of American Ecocriticism can in part be traced to Leo Marx and his 1964 book, *The Machine in the Garden*. The premise of the book is that any given culture views nature according to its own desires and needs. In early America, there were competing visions about the future direction of the nation — one rural and one industrial. These ideas collided, and eventually converged. In the book, Leo Marx explores the tension between those attitudes, where rural calm and simplicity contrast with urban control and sophistication (1964: 19).

Leo Marx's book follows the American migration westward and details the human contacts with the overwhelming scale of the environment, the taming of hostile lands and peoples, and the mechanistic nation that emerged in the form of modern America. Finishing the book compels the reader to reflect on larger cultural questions. Is there such a thing as an *overdeveloped* nation? Was there a time, during an earlier period, when America had a healthier balance between cultural attitudes, technology, and the natural world? What might this tell us about human beings in the age of *hypertechnology*?

While *The Machine in the Garden* was an important contribution to American Ecocriticism, Leo Marx did not go nearly as far as Carson did in terms of environmental advocacy. His view, while complex and powerful, attempted to retain an objective distance. Magee has suggested that Leo Marx did not go far enough in advocating conservation — "Part of the reason for Marx's dismissal of some types of environmental concerns may be historical: he published his book in 1964, just as the modern environmental movement was getting started" (2002: 35). While hindsight always brings greater clarity, it is notable that Marx did not take the next logical step in developing the ecologically critical position that Carson displayed during the same period. Interestingly, Leo Marx's sensitivity to cultural developments combines with Carson's environmental advocacy in the work of Lawrence Buell.

In 1978, William Rueckert first used the term *Ecocriticism* in an essay called "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism". In the essay, Rueckert examines the parallels between the study of biology and the study of literature. At the time, his call for interdisciplinary collaboration echoed the decades-long liberal arts tradition of wide academic engagement. For many years after Rueckert's essay, however, the term Ecocriticism lay dormant. It was not until 1989 that Cheryl Glotfelty revived the expression.

Glen Love's *Practical Ecocriticism* (2003) suggests that environmental literature is really grounded in the life sciences, particularly in biology. Love attempts to bridge the void that exists between the humanities and sciences in the study of literature. This is a difficult task, but in step with the interdisciplinary engagement for which Rueckert has appealed. In some ways, this book can be seen as a kind of duplication (and expansion) of William Rueckert's original Ecocritical essay, in that Love advocates a pseudo-scientific approach to the study of literature.

Dana Phillips' *The Truth of Ecology* is particularly influential to current ecocritical investigations. He pulls no punches in his critique of the state of the movement. Phillips suggests that Ecocriticism has already become stagnant. Phillips also criticizes those who do not fully engage with theory while still holding up the ecocritical banner. As Phillips reminds us, "enjoying a good book about hiking or canoeing won't make you an ecocritic" (2003: 143). He points out the kind of simplistic mysticism with which many so-called ecocritics regard the natural world. This, in his view, produces an almost devotional irrationality that does not fit in the academic tradition.

Another significant issue that Phillips addresses is the unease ecocritics have at scrutinizing themselves. Phillips suggests that Ecocriticism, "needs to involve both vigorous internal debate and the painstaking working out of new insights that might make Ecocriticism's argument more persuasive to outsiders and to insiders, too, than it has been thus far" (41). He does convincingly argue that there is still theoretical work to be done. Phillips' book, then, is useful in the current ecocritical debate.

The best-known Ecocritic is Lawrence Buell, professor of literature at Harvard University. He suggests that *toxic discourse* gives human needs (and, to extend his logic, other forms of life) priority over needs of industry. He also suggests that place has often been undervalued, or ignored, or simply forgotten in the literary analysis of texts: "We've gotten used to character, theme and plot; it's the sense of place that is ignored or slighted. The

ecocritics are trying to remedy that” (Panini, 1995: 53). Buell’s research on environmental criticism has helped push the movement into a more legitimate position within the academy.

### **2.5. Challenges to broad acceptance**

Buell’s *The Future of Environmental Criticism* is a significant contribution to the ecocritical movement. The book is a positive evaluation of the progression of the movement. Buell suggests that there are four challenges that Ecocriticism faces. The first challenge is “organizational” (2005: 128). The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment is the professional association that promotes Ecocritical scholarship. A number of quality journals now exist as outlets for peer-reviewed articles in the discipline. Ecocritics are publishing articles in a number of peer-reviewed journals. Many are also publishing books. Buell’s first challenge has been met. Buell himself is encouraged by the speed at which the movement has been able to organize itself (129).

Buell’s second challenge is “professional legitimation” (128). This involves gaining territory. Ecocriticism needs to carve out a larger place for the movement. Ecocriticism is now often absorbed into other disciplines. It is reasonable to believe that the second challenge could resolve itself over time. As Buell argues,

The challenge of professional legitimation, by contrast, still has not been met, although the situation is changing slowly for the better. Environmental criticism and literature and the arts clearly does not yet have standing within the academy of such other issue-driven discourses as those of race, gender, sexuality, class, and globalization (129).

Buell suggests that until Ecocriticism obtains at least a status comparable to that of other existing fields, that the movement cannot be considered completely established. The final two challenges, according to Buell, are trickier to solve and will require more study. Buell suggests that the third challenge to the movement’s broad acceptance is to “defin[e] distinctive models of critical inquiry” (130). While he does not necessarily advocate an entirely new critical framework, Buell does suggest that first wave Ecocriticism has ridden the wave of “disaffection with critical theory-as-usual” (130). As Buell (and others) have shown, Ecocriticism needs its own concrete system of literary analysis, against which texts can be measured in

terms of discovering ecological constituents. The problem will be defining an approach with which ecocritics will agree.

Given the diversity of Ecocriticism's practitioners, though, this is highly unlikely to occur any time soon. Perhaps Ecocriticism does not need a single methodology, but rather a number of methodologies. One can already see variant forms of Ecocriticism emerging. *Ecofeminism* is perhaps the best example (see *The Sexual Politics of Meat: a Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* by Carol Adams). Indeed, so many different approaches fall underneath the ecocritical umbrella that it is sometimes difficult to find threads of commonality.

Buell's third challenge (distinctive forms of ecocritical methodological complexity) is closely related to the fourth challenge — "establishing significance beyond the academy" (2005: 128). Arnold has argued that "[Critics claim that Ecocriticism] is concerned only with contemporary literature and lacks theoretical sophistication" (1999: 1102). The fourth issue can be resolved over time. While Buell suggests that there are four main barriers to Ecocriticism's broad acceptance, other outstanding issues are potentially problematical for the movement.

## **2.6. Are Green Studies really red?**

Issues of race, class, and gender are typically the stuff of leftist critics. "Very broadly, scholars say that [Ecocriticism] adds place to the categories of race, class, and gender used to analyze literature" (Winkler, 1996: A8). This would seem to suggest that Ecocriticism is another leftist approach, trying to extract progressive ideas from literary works in the hopes of promoting social change. Like other humanistic approaches, Ecocriticism is ideologically driven. As Estok has argued, "Ecocriticism is committed to changing things" (2001: online).

One can easily imagine Ecocriticism fitting alongside feminism or even Marxism. Buell's vision of Ecocriticism fits this explanation more than that of Glotfelty. As Buell argues, "imagine how the voices of environmentalist dissent within Western culture might help reinvision it and how they themselves must be critically reinvisioned in order to enlist them to this end" (1995: 22). Thomas Newhouse agrees that Ecocriticism must remain ideologically grounded (1993: 28). Simon Estok shares a similar position and has argued that "ecocriticism is committed to changing things" (2001: online).

### 2.7 Just another *-ism*?

Another problem Ecocriticism will have will be overcoming the impression that it is just another way to reduce complex problems to a simplistic black and white rubric. Such an impression already plagues other leftist approaches and, “[a]t its worst, this leads to solipsistic, self-indulgent, holier-than-thou posturing” (Crockett, 1994: online). A simplistic view would suggest that those on the left are good while those on the right are bad. Michael P. Cohen also warns against this oversimplification, what he describes as the, “praise-song school” of criticism (2004: online). If Ecocriticism insists on a good dog/bad dog dichotomy, then it cannot be critical of itself and will insist on an adversarial relationship with texts. If Ecocriticism is to have a long-term effect on literary studies, then it must move beyond what Kroeber has described as, “Antagonistic oppositionalism” (1994: 3).

Ecocritics often claim that the movement is interdisciplinary. Many argue that the movement is a large tent, under which a multitude of different approaches/subjects can be found. The diversity within the movement requires a wider view. Jean Arnold has argued,

Looking at texts for their ideas about the natural world results in a cross-fertilization of the humanities with other academic disciplines: when literature combines with biology, cultural theory, biochemistry, art, ecology, history, another sciences, any combination of these fields forms a cauldron of brand-new perspectives (1999: 1089).

Such openness to other disciplines is a welcome change in literary studies, though it remains unclear just how interdisciplinary the movement really is. Ecocriticism today remains a largely American, largely literary movement. An additional problem, possibly temporary, is Ecocriticism’s relatively narrow focus on American literature. As Jean Arnold has shown, “It is now routine to complain that ecocriticism is the limited province of American literature scholars and, furthermore, that it is concerned only with contemporary literature” (1999: 1102). Ecocritical studies have historically been applied to only American literature, though similar studies are being conducted in the UK and commonwealth countries. It should be noted that recent Ecocritical studies have recently broadened to include postcolonial literatures. Given the relative youth of Ecocriticism, it is normal that it will take some time for ecocritical ideas to ripple through global literatures. This

will likely produce some thoroughly new approaches based on distinctive cultural and historical factors.

### 3. Conclusion

Ecocriticism, therefore, is an academic response to the economic, political, and social disorder caused by environmental upheaval. English and literature departments have long dealt with issues of race, class, and gender. However, as Estok has shown, “the English profession has failed to respond in any significant way to the issue of the environment” (2001: online). Ecocriticism, as such, is a helpful academic means to examine the contemporary human relationship with nature.

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*INTERACTIONS, INTERPRETATIONS*



# HALF A CENTURY OF LINGUISTICS: SOME REFLECTIONS AND REMINISCENCES

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**Abstract:** *In 1957 two ground-breaking books were published in the field of linguistics, Chomsky's "Syntactic Structures" and Lado's "Linguistics across Cultures", which have strongly influenced the development of theoretical and applied linguistics respectively over the past half-century. This paper briefly compares their widely different approaches, noting also certain points of contact that subsequent research has revealed. It ends with a few personal reminiscences concerning Chomsky and Lado.*

**Keywords:** *Chomsky, culture, Lado, linguistics, structure, syntax.*

## 1. Introduction

Just over half a century ago now, the year 1957 saw the publication of two important and influential books, *Syntactic Structures* by Noam Chomsky and *Linguistics across Cultures* by Robert Lado, which, over the intervening decades, have come to be recognized as the beginning, each in its own way, of major strands in modern linguistic research. Their titles have therefore acquired a symbolic significance. This paper sketches out some of the developments initiated by these two slender paper-covered volumes, placing them in a wider context. The undue pretensions suggested by the first part of the title of this paper should be tempered with the far more modest second half. The presentation will thus be fairly general, necessarily superficial, but also in part quite personal.

As is well known to linguists across the world, Chomsky's book heralded a veritable revolution in linguistic theory, with strong reverberations in the study of language acquisition and of the nature of the human mind. It introduced new ideas associated with the concept of transformational-generative grammar, affirmed abstract reasoning and rigid formalism, and thus set off a chain of major developments in *theoretical linguistics*. In fact it had the effect of a time bomb: when it appeared nobody outside a small circle

of initiated enthusiasts was able to grasp its full potential, but subsequent works by Chomsky himself and his followers actually succeeded in revitalizing the study of language in large sections of the world's community of linguists. With time, the generative enterprise, which had also encountered some serious opposition in different quarters, split up into factions and was supplemented with rival theories, notably those arising within cognitive linguistics. However, its overall contribution must be recognized despite certain weaknesses and even occasional blind alleys.

In contrast, Lado's book marked a fresh start in empirical work with languages as expressions of cultures, motivated by the practical concerns of developing foreign language teaching methodology through contrastive and error analysis, language testing and related techniques, in this way laying a new foundation for the vital domain of *applied linguistics*. The purpose of this work transcended the mere contrasting of linguistic systems, reaching out into a more comprehensive comparison of linguistic, social and cultural features and thus eventually advancing intercultural understanding. And so, just as in the case of *Syntactic Structures*, a slim volume demonstrated the potential to stimulate and guide the research of generations of followers.

These were field workers rather than "armchair theorists" in the Chomskian tradition; in both cases, however, the wide and expanding circles of linguists remained crucially indebted to the two respective trailblazers. This much can surely be claimed, quite apart from any wish to engage in a comparative evaluation of the impact of these scholars or of their works, which is not our concern here.

## **2. Points of contact**

While the trends thus set in motion may appear to be worlds apart in subject matter, intent and approach, it would be unwise to state resolutely that the twain shall never meet. They cannot be reasonably expected to merge, but fifty years on, one detects significant points of contact in the ongoing process of cross-fertilization between "theoretical" and "applied" approaches to the investigation of language and languages. Speaking quite generally, abstract thinking tends to be increasingly contextualized in major areas of recent and current research, such as cognitive linguistics or cross-cultural pragmatics. At the same time, empirical studies are seeking firm

theoretical grounding, for example in discourse analysis or in Labovian sociolinguistics. To take only the latter, sociolinguistics today is far removed from its position a few decades ago, when it could be characterised as a field “a mile wide and an inch deep” (Hymes, 1974: 194). How did this change come about?

Briefly, Labov’s meticulous observation of sound change in progress on Martha’s Vineyard, an island off the coast of Massachusetts, which had long been a popular summer resort for rich mainlanders (Labov, 1963), followed by his ground-breaking investigation of New York City speech (Labov, 1966), laid the theoretical and methodological foundation for a *systematic correlation of linguistic and social variation*, the very essence of sociolinguistics as we know it today. This was made possible by erecting, on top of the horizontal (geographic) axis of traditional dialectology, a vertical (social) dimension of variation.

It was no longer sufficient to determine simply what was said in one given location as against another; what became the focus of attention was who precisely in that location said what, when and to whom, speaking informally or more formally, etc. In this way, the new urban or social dialectology was able not only to establish linguistic facts, but also to account for them in social terms; in other words, to offer explanations for the linguistic behaviour observed. While Labov’s work inspired similar studies elsewhere (e.g. that on the speech of Norwich in Trudgill, 1974), other researchers developed their own approaches (e.g. the social network theory of Milroy, 1987). Taken together, efforts like these definitely raised the scientific status of sociolinguistics.

There is now a compromise if not a merger of “theory” and “application” in other domains too. One is language universals research, where the stark opposition between the theoretical position associated with Chomsky and the empirical investigations exemplified by the work of Joseph Greenberg no longer seems to hold. Another is contrastive linguistics itself, whose very identity would perhaps be lost, if one still insisted on a sharp distinction between its pedagogical and theoretical branches. All in all, then, it seems to me that our increasingly interrelated world, diverse and “multi-culti” but globalising, holds promise of an essentially more integrated linguistics of the future. (Incidentally, such a vision has been with me for some twenty years now; I reported on it at the Fourteenth International Congress of Linguists in Berlin in 1987 — see Bugarski, 1990).

It is not possible here to flesh out these sketchy but far-reaching suggestions. I propose instead to organise most of the rest of this paper around the four content words occurring in the titles of the two books I started out discussing, taken in their base forms, and for my present purpose representing four key concepts, or pillars of a scaffolding, on which some crucial segments of twentieth-century linguistic thought rest. These four are **linguistics**, **syntax**, **culture**, and **structure**; so let me take them up in turn.

### 3. Four basic notions

#### 3.1. Linguistics

This is a good example of a field of study with a shifting definition: for as long as it has existed, different practitioners have imposed on it their own particular interpretations of what the discipline was supposed to deal with centrally, and what perhaps marginally, if at all. To say that linguistics is the scientific study of language is of course universally acceptable, but tautologous; and the moment one attempts to be more precise about the meaning of “language” (exactly which aspects of this notoriously multi-faceted phenomenon does it cover?), one necessarily concentrates on a particular choice from among numerous possibilities: language as essentially an instrument of thought and cognition, a system of communication, a kind of human behaviour, a means of social cohesion, a structure seen synchronically or in evolution, etc.

Here we may identify two extreme positions. One can be epitomised by recalling Roman Jakobson’s well-known paraphrase of Terence: “Linguista sum; linguistici nihil a me alienum puto” (“I am a linguist; nothing linguistic is alien to me” — Jakobson, 1960: 377). Just how wide-ranging such a claim might be is well illustrated by the same author’s famous opening lecture at the Tenth International Congress of Linguists in Bucharest in 1967 (see Jakobson, 1969). At the opposite end, one may place the view, notably associated with Chomsky, that linguistics is that particular problem area or approach which is of special interest to an influential individual researcher or the school of thought he represents, whereas all the rest may perhaps be worthwhile to somebody else, but is not “real” linguistics. In this day and age the former option is in an operational sense clearly unmanageable for a single discipline, and the latter is far too restrictive, so a balance

should be sought — possibly, I would suggest, somewhere along the lines of the integrative effort noted above.

### 3.2. Syntax

Scattered contributions to the syntactic level of linguistic analysis can be found across the ages, some of them rather sophisticated even by present-day standards (for an extensive historical review of the last two centuries see Graffi, 2001), but on the whole, syntax has not fared very well in modern times, having been overshadowed by the rise of Indo-European comparative linguistics in the nineteenth century. The comprehensive grammars of the age typically opened with a very substantial part on the sounds, followed by a shorter one on word-building and then a rather lean chapter about syntax. A century later history repeated itself in American structuralism, with grammars of lesser-known languages exhibiting a comparable disproportion, in that syntax lagged far behind phonology and morphology in the space allotted to it.

Why was this so? One reason, I would venture to suggest, might lie in the very nature of syntax as, essentially, what the word itself says: arrangement. While the other linguistic levels operate with identifiable and reasonably “palpable” *units* such as phonemes, morphemes or lexemes, syntax is primarily a system of *relations* among such units and hence so abstract as to be much more difficult to grasp or pin down: something which happens in the process of combining items that have their real identity elsewhere, somewhat like the mere elusive “air” between “things”. And so it fell to the Chomskian revolution, starting in 1957, to rehabilitate syntax, even to the extent (to be challenged shortly thereafter) of making it the central component of linguistic description. Much more than that, in fact: Chomsky effectively specified the traditional image of man as *Homo loquens* by rewriting it as *Homo syntacticus* (animals communicate, but only humans talk, by operating complex syntactic systems). This emphasis was subsequently modified with the reaffirmation of semantics and the rise of pragmatics and discourse analysis, so that syntax, no longer either a stepchild of linguistics or its apex, can today be described as one among equals — and that, it seems to me, is what it should be.

### 3.3. Culture

In itself, the notion of culture scarcely needs highlighting, as everyone these days seems to be talking about culture, multiculturalism, cross-cultur-

alism, interculturalism, language and culture, and so on. Indeed, “culture” has become a buzz-word in much of linguistics, but also in the social sciences more generally. What this overworked but extremely vague term does need, however, is precisely focused elaboration, some sharpened but context-sensitive discussion. By this I do not mean searching for a new general definition of the term itself, an addition to the already vast number of definitional attempts. We may recall that over fifty years ago two American anthropologists collected and analysed no fewer than 164 definitions of “culture” in anthropological and sociological literature; that number must have increased considerably in the meantime. The first of these, offered in 1871 by the British anthropologist Edward Tyler, seems worth quoting on this occasion:

Culture, or civilization... is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952: 81).

Apart from the opening, which begs the important question of the distinction between culture and civilization, a topic much debated in various European traditions of cultural studies, this definition is strikingly modern in anticipating the now prevalent all-embracing “way of life” concept of culture.

What I have in mind is rather a systematic analysis of the different ways in which members of particular human cultures interpret the notion of culture as a fundamental part of their lives and experiences, how they conceptualise and value their own cultural institutions, beliefs and practices — in a word, something like “Culture across cultures”. By way of illustration, just a few days before coming to Timișoara to participate in the 2008 British and American Studies conference, I spent a day in the far north of Sweden, a mere 120 kilometres below the Arctic Circle, as a member of a Council of Europe expert delegation concerned with the protection of minority languages.

One of these was Sami, and so we met with several representatives of its speakers, including the Chairman of the Sami Parliament and the leaders of the local youth organisation. As we talked — mostly in English, with only occasional use of the interpretation services — I couldn’t help reflecting on two things. One, how inadequate my own stereotype of Sami culture had been. And two, more to the point, I wondered how this traditional commu-



nity might fit modern Swedish technology and life-style into their native cultural patterns: what could be their perceptions of cultural values in a small universe combining reindeer grazing with computers, and their Sami dialects with Swedish — and sometimes English too?

### 3.4. Structure

Lastly, the notion of structure, relatively well-defined in comparison with that of culture, has after a period of concentrated attention faded into the background, to my mind unjustly, and hence needs rehabilitating. It saw its heyday in the early decades of the twentieth century, starting with Ferdinand de Saussure's seminal *Cours de linguistique générale* of 1916 (even though, curiously, the word "structure" does not occur in this Bible of linguistic structuralism!). From linguistics, the concept quickly spread into other fields, as documented, for example, by the review in Bastide (1962). Yet in the latter half of the century, it came to be largely discredited by Chomsky's relentless attack on one particular brand of structuralism, represented by Leonard Bloomfield and his followers.

In exposing the limitations of this American school, Chomsky in effect wrote off structuralism *tout court*. However, it has always seemed to me that this was a gross oversimplification. At a conference of the European Linguistic Society in Copenhagen in 1981 — and subsequently on other occasions — I put forward the view, shared by some but apparently not many at the time, that generativism was an offshoot of structuralism rather than a replacement for it. This position I symbolically encapsulated in the term *generative structuralism* (see Bugarski, 1982).

To me, then, the concept of structure (in the sense of a system of relations holding among the units making it up and defining it both statically and dynamically) remains the key linguistic idea of the twentieth century, productively echoed in the other social and human sciences. I would argue that today, ninety years after de Saussure's *Cours*, it deserves to be reaffirmed, while, of course, taking into account the considerable interim achievements of linguistic theory and analysis.

## 4. By way of conclusion: some personal reminiscences

I wish to end with a few recollections regarding Chomsky and Lado. My encounter with *Syntactic Structures* was, if anything, painful: what little

formal training in linguistics I had received previously was of an entirely different nature, of course. Like, I suppose, pretty nearly everyone else at the time, I found myself confronted with a text I could hardly understand, an experience amply and repeatedly shared by generations of my students later on! I recall ploughing through the book in a postgraduate seminar at University College London in 1962, conducted by the American structuralist James Sledd, himself a novice in this new variety of linguistic theory.

I met Chomsky in person only once, at Columbia University in New York, in 1966. A year later I tried to contact him during a visit to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, but he was away. Still, I was received by his colleague and collaborator Morris Halle, who proudly pointed to a thick black book on his office desk, saying simply "There it is, finally!". This was a pre-publication copy of *The Sound Pattern of English* by Chomsky and Halle, a treatise with some history of underground circulation which upon official publication was to become the classic text of generative phonology. I felt honoured by the privilege of leafing through it as we talked...

In the following years I corresponded with Chomsky on a couple of occasions. (May I remind you that these were the good old days, long before e-mail, when you could actually write letters to people and get letters in return, complete with signature, envelope and stamp!). In 1972 my edition of Chomsky's selected writings in Serbo-Croatian translation, which constituted the first introduction to his work in Yugoslavia, was published in Belgrade. I sent copies to him and, on his suggestion, to "his friend Roman Jakobson", as he put it. I was amused by this qualification, since I recalled some of Chomsky's printed references to Jakobson's works which did not strike me as particularly friendly. But then, I suppose, prevailing notions of academic style differed as between the United States and Europe, perhaps especially in those years of head-on conflicts in linguistics. Anyway, both copies were acknowledged by the recipients, with positive comments, to my great satisfaction.

In comparison with Chomsky's work, Lado's book made for much easier reading on the whole, though it too contained sections I found rather difficult because of my lack of detailed knowledge of the linguistic (and cross-linguistic) material being treated. Lado too I met only once, at a conference at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. in 1970. Years later I was invited by Kurt Jankowsky, editor of a Festschrift for Lado, to contribute to that volume. I responded to the honour by sending an article whose title,

“Translation across cultures”, was obviously inspired by that of Lado’s widely known volume (see Bugarski, 1985).

This concludes my highly selective, not to say patchy, account of some of the major developments in language study over the past fifty years, seen in the light of two books and through the lens of four key words in their titles. I must apologize for referring to my own work and experiences more often than academic decency would normally permit — but then I did say at the outset that my story would in part be personal. I just thought it might not be entirely inappropriate for me on this occasion to share with you a few fragments of my memories concerning two distinguished linguists and their works whose common recent anniversary prompted my thoughts on the subject.

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# POLITENESS RELATIONS AT AN ENGLISH-BULGARIAN ACADEMIC MEETING

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**Abstract:** *The paper makes use of a discursive approach, and analyses the interpersonal relations in a group of one British and seven Bulgarian academics during a professional discussion. The results show that in building their code of situational co-membership, these speakers tend to prioritize professional knowledge and shared responsibility for the fulfillment of the task at hand and intentionally “let pass” potentially face-threatening situations. This has led the author to conclude that in professional encounters, where emphasis is on cooperativeness, solidarity and respect for the identity of the ‘other’, politeness relations cannot be adequately accounted for by facework norms alone, but require a broader and more flexible discursive approach, where acts are evaluated in terms of appropriateness to the ongoing interaction process as an element of the type of social practice it associates with.*

**Keywords:** *academic context, discursive approach, interaction, politeness, rapport management.*

## 1. Introduction

Politeness has been in the focus of scholarly attention for a long time now but the spate of studies on its nature and manifestations in diverse socio-cultural domains have failed to bring about a consensus on what it is exactly and how it should be defined. One reason for the vacillation of interpretations is the polysemous nature of the term ‘politeness’, used to refer, on the one hand, to folk perceptions of what counts as socially correct behaviour, and to an abstract theoretical construct, on the other (Watts, 2003).

Another problem is rooted in the ontology of the concept which, owing to its position at the intersection of cognitive, socio-psychological, socio-cultural, and linguistic processes, allows for different aspects to be taken as central in its characterization (Holtgraves, 2005). As a result, scholars’ con-

sensus on what politeness is does not seem to go much beyond a general understanding that it is an evaluative and normative concept largely associated with social appropriateness and maintenance of social harmony in interaction (Lakoff, 1990; Fraser, 1990; Sifianou, 1992; Kasper, 1990, etc.).

Politeness research covers a broad range of topics from conceptualization and design of politeness models (Leech, 1983; Brown and Levinson, 1987; Watts, 2003, etc.) through critical applications of Brown and Levinson's seminal model in different cultural contexts (Matsumoto, 1988; Gu, 1990; Slavova, 2004; Sifianou, 1992) to empirical work on the enactment of politeness in particular speech activities (Blum-Kulka, 1987; Georgieva, 1995; Holmes and Schnurr, 2005) or in relation to specific social categories and practices (Watts, 1992; Holmes, 1988).

Motivated by the belief that, in order to gain an understanding of this slippery notion, one must begin by examining very closely what happens in the flow of social interaction itself, in this study I take a discursive approach and analyze politeness through the kind of relational work employed by participants in a given communicative event for the purpose of maintaining social equilibrium. As the event under study involves communication across cultures, I shall further explore the ways interactants struggle over their cultural differences to bring to alignment their stances on what should count as appropriate and polite in the situation at hand.

The communicative event subject of analysis is representative of academic discourse and contains a multitude of culturally and institutionally motivated patterns of communicative behaviour pertaining to the educational domain. Another characteristic feature with an impact on participants' speech performance is that this is a working meeting with a clear purpose and well defined outcomes. This comes to suggest that in managing their interpersonal relations cross-culturally, participants will have to keep in view the distinctly transactional, in the sense of Brown and Yule (1983), ends of the interchange.

Given these contextual parameters of the event, I intend to explore: first, whether, and to what extent, the cross-cultural composition of the group and the professional specialization of the talk have an impact on the participants' verbal behaviour in terms of politeness, more specifically, how interactants manage to strike a balance between needs of communicative efficiency and rapport management; second, what are participants' politeness judgments based on? Further, how do they overcome culturally moti-

vated differences, if any, in their preferences for strategies of rapport or face management?

Against the backdrop of a brief overview of major views on politeness, in the remaining part of the paper, I provide the theoretical rationale for the discursive model employed in the study, followed by a socio-pragmatic analysis of the corpus material and a discussion centred on the questions posited as research objectives.

## **2. Politeness and social interaction**

In studying politeness, one automatically deals with social interaction, as politeness emerges through and is an integral part of the interaction process. Accordingly, a connection between politeness and general models of communication can be discerned in all politeness theories propounded so far, but with some variation in their interactional orientation. Inasmuch as the starting assumption for this paper is that the study of politeness must be embedded into a broader category of management of social relations in interaction, it seems tenable to trace how the issue has been tackled by other researchers.

A number of theories consider politeness in relation to Grice's pragmatic model of Cooperative Principle (CP) (1975). Closest to it is the model propounded by Leech (1983), where a Politeness Principle, created by analogy with CP, is considered to complement CP in accounting for interpersonal relations in interaction by reducing undesirable friction and maintaining feelings of comity amongst conversational partners. The Politeness Principle functions through a set of maxims analyzable from an 'absolute' (intrinsic in the semantic meaning of structures) and 'relative' (contextually motivated, hence variable) perspective. Politeness meanings are inferred as implicatures from Speaker's acts and ranked in terms of degree of politeness on a number of independent pragmatic scales of values.

Despite his impressively elaborate model however, Leech has been vehemently criticized for having defined his Politeness Principle in so very general terms as to allow different politeness readings to be made possible in different contexts (Gu, 1992), virtually conducive to the generation of an 'endless series of maxims and combinations of maxims' (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 4). Moreover, owing to its speech-act focus and rigidly pre-defined maxims, the model is regarded as far removed from linguistic real-

ity, with limited chances for crossover between analysts' and participants' perceptions of politeness in actual language use (Sifianou, 1992; Georgieva, 1995; Haugh, 2007).

Indeed, in a recent revision of his model, Leech (2007) has tried to curb the generating power of the Politeness Principle, currently labeled Grand Strategy of Politeness, by substituting the pre-defined maxims for constraints on Speakers' communicative behaviour determined by participants' personal wants and features of context. He preserves the distinction between pragmatic and semantic (absolute) politeness though, so the contested idea of some structures being inherently polite remains intact.

Another model leaning on the Gricean CP is the Conversational Contract (CC) Model, which stipulates that the social equilibrium deemed necessary for the normal unfolding of a conversation is safeguarded through a specific conversational contract agreed between conversational partners. Accordingly, being polite constitutes operating within the then current terms and conditions of the CC (Fraser, 1990: 233). By taking speakers' own cultural baggage into account and allowing discursive renegotiation and readjustment of stances to bring them in line with the continually changing conditions of the situation at hand, the CC Model provides a more powerful instrument of politeness description. It has been criticized however for being unable to set apart politeness negotiations from cooperation prototypically ingrained in conversation, thus blurring the distinction between 'politeness' and 'social appropriateness' (Watts, 2003: 81).

Brown and Levinson have also localized their Face Theory in relation to Grice's CP, but in a spirit quite contrary to earlier interpretations. They regard conversational maxims as the 'unmarked' or 'socially neutral framework for communication' underlying all rational efficient talk, whereas politeness accounts for the deviations from that neutral framework, virtually providing the 'principled reasons' for such deviations (1987: 5). Though implicated from CP, therefore, politeness differs radically from it in that it constitutes a *message that has to be communicated*.

Contrariwise, conversational maxims, as natural milestones of effective interaction, can be taken for granted. The need to overtly communicate politeness derives from interactants' 'face wants', an idea borrowed from Goffman (1959). Defined as 'the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself/ herself' (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 61), face needs have to be constantly attended to by Speaker and Hearer to avoid potential



threats by acts that are intrinsically face-threatening (FTA). If, however, a FTA is deemed unavoidable, then the speaker can counteract by choosing a politeness strategy from one of two alternative types: *positive* (signaling willingness for solidarity and cooperation) and *negative* (signaling deference, demeanour or restraint).

Through politeness strategies therefore speakers convey their intention to be polite by reducing the face loss that a direct production of a FTA might incur. The choice of strategy is largely determined by the seriousness of the FTA which may be computed, according to the authors, in terms of three independent and culturally sensitive variables: *social distance*, *power* of Speaker relative to Hearer and absolute ranking of *impositions* in a specific culture. So unlike Goffman, who sees 'facework' as an integral aspect of communication governed by a multitude of social, moral and cultural norms, Brown and Levinson subject the choice of politeness strategy to the seriousness of specific, externally defined FTAs (Bragiella-Chiappini, 2003: 1464).

Inasmuch as it draws a clear borderline between the function of conversational maxims and politeness strategies in conversation, Brown and Levinson's model provides a very powerful analytical instrument for investigation of politeness. Nevertheless, by applying it to different cultural contexts, researchers have uncovered some serious flaws, which have given rise to severe criticisms on theoretical, methodological and socio-cultural grounds. Of those relevant to the topic of discussion, I may point out the pre-identified, speech-act based status of FTAs, conducive, according to many, to a 'decision-free' choice of strategies that excludes cultural variability (Matsumoto, 1988; Gu, 1992; Sifianou, 1993; Vikki, 2006, etc) and reduces communication to a simple process of 'interactants' mutual monitoring of politeness threats to each others' face, which robs interaction of all acts of pleasure' (Nwoye, 1992: 311).

Also, the rather inflexible distinction between positive and negative politeness is practically conducive to barring the simultaneous use of different types of strategy, which runs counter to linguistic reality (Spencer-Oatey, 2005; Watts, 2003; Locher, 2006; Haugh, 2007). Finally, the inability of the social dimensions suggested for measuring the weightiness of FTAs to account for the complex diversity of social, cultural and psychological variables pertaining to human interaction (Spencer-Oatey, 1996; Terkourafi, 2004; Vikkim, 2006). What I see as the most serious problem, however, is

the adoption of the Gricean principle of interpreting politeness meaning through inferences made about Speaker intentions.

Thus, in spite of their explicitly stated intention to ‘focus on dyadic patterns of verbal interaction as the expression of social relationships’ (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 2), the analysis remains on an utterance level and fails to capture manifestations of politeness stretching beyond a single speech act, or permeating the whole interchange. As a result, many scholars today (e.g. Kasper, 1990; Watts, 2003; Locher, 2006; Spencer-Oatey, 2002, etc.) stand by the view that politeness is much less straightforward than Brown and Levinson’s hypothesis suggests and demands a discursive approach.

The model broadly referred to as ‘discursive’ takes the most serious move away from Grice’s pragmatic theory of conversation. It conceptualizes politeness as constituent of a broader construct inherent in all human interaction to account for interpersonal relations. In Locher and Watts’(2005) version discussed here, this broader construct is termed ‘relational work’ and defined as comprising “the entire spectrum of behaviour, from rude and impolite via normal, appropriate and unmarked, to marked and polite” (Locher, 2006: 250). On this basis a distinction between polite and politic behaviour is introduced. *Polite* is only that behaviour “perceived to be salient or marked” (Locher and Watts, 2005:17), whereas “behaviour perceived to be appropriate to the social constraints of the ongoing interaction” (Watts, 2003: 19), but which may reasonably go unnoticed for not being explicitly marked, is called *politic*.

Unlike Brown and Levinson’s rather static face construct, in this model face is socially attributed in the course of interaction and “discursively negotiated” (Locher, 2006: 251). This interpretation is closer to Goffman’s understanding of face as an image diffusely located in the flow of events and pieced together from the expressive implications of the whole interaction (1959). Because ‘face’ is so sensitive to what each participant deems appropriate to the social interaction at any given moment, analysts emphasize the need for exploring relational work that stretches over an entire communicative encounter. For this purpose, they adopt a model claimed to move away from Grice’s pre-defined, universally valid conversational maxims and based on:

... the theory of practice and related theory of emergent networks, both of which draw on members’ past experiences of previous interaction and the

institutionalized, objectified structures of social reality that have been internalized in the process (Watts, 2003: 201).

What we see in Locher and Watts' model therefore is an attempt to link all three concepts with which politeness is associated and which occur separately as pivotal principles of the models previously discussed, viz. face-work, social rules and maxims and conversational rights and obligations. According to this three-pronged construct, ongoing evaluations of (im)polite or politic behaviour are determined, on the one hand, by the *frame* or *habitus* of the participants, and the lines taken in the interaction, on the other (Locher and Watts, 2005: 17). The shift in the conceptualization of politeness calls for a new theory of communication. Accordingly, Grice's inferencing model is replaced by Sperber and Wilson's Relevance theory (1986) where meaning is inferred from assumptions made on the basis of a shared, 'mutually manifest' cognitive environment.

While the discursive approach has consolidated a number of emerging trends in politeness research, calling for greater emphasis to be placed on evaluations made by participants, a closer examination of the assumptions underlying it reveals some inconsistencies that seem to undermine its utility as an alternative analytic model. One major challenge pointed by researchers (Haugh, 2007; Leech, 2007) is the lack of objective criteria for defining the boundaries between 'polite' and 'politic' behaviour. Another cause for concern is the limited number of categories constituting relational work whereupon it is incapable of accounting for the full range of evaluative meanings commonly used to qualify interpersonal relations — warm, friendly, considerate, respectful, generous, courteous, deferential, insolent, aggressive, etc. (Spencer-Oatey, 2005).

What appears to create a real methodological problem however is the idea to base the analysis on Relevance Theory as a theory of communication, as it, an improved inferential model in Sperber & Wilson's own words (1986: 3), holds the analysis still in the domain of inferences made about Speaker's intentions which they have actually wanted to avoid. These inconsistencies notwithstanding, scholars working in the discursive framework have brought into relief some crucial points about politeness that have long been in the air but have not as yet received serious attention.

They have stressed the need for creating new, data-driven, interactionally oriented models that reflect how speakers themselves evaluate each other's behaviour as participants in interaction. They have recognized that,

owing to its inherent variability and potential indeterminacy, politeness defies rigid taxonomic categorizations and they have proposed instead broader approaches that embrace, in addition to normative constraints and conventions of language use, the cultural beliefs, self-concepts and role expectations of those actually participating in communication. As these views comply with my conception of politeness, I take a discursive approach for the current analysis of (im)polite verbal behaviour in academic context.

### 3. Model of analysis

My paper considers (im)politeness as an inherent feature of interaction embedded in a broader framework of management of interpersonal relations and explores the factors that influence the management of (im)polite forms of verbal behaviour in collaborative interaction. In line with the adopted discursive approach, I maintain, with Spencer-Oatey (2002), that the three main perspectives — the Conversational Maxim view, the face-saving view and the Conversational Contract view — are not alternative, but complementary, each having a role to play in uncovering the complexity of social relationships in interaction. The analysis is based on Spencer-Oatey's model of rapport management embracing all actions taken by participants in an interaction for the purpose of maintaining "the relative harmony and smoothness of their relations" (2005: 96). Unlike Grice's CP, regarded as a default feature of conversation, rapport is established 'on site' and serves to signal 'situational co-membership' (Erickson, 1996), or as belonging to an 'emergent network' (Watts, 2003). Moreover, as a dynamic notion, rapport can be enhanced, neglected, damaged or, at least, maintained.

I accept Spencer-Oatey's definition of politeness as a "subjective judgment that people make about the social appropriateness of verbal and non-verbal behaviour"; (Im)polite is not considered an inherent quality of behaviour itself, but an "evaluative label that people attach to behaviour as a result of their subjective judgments about social appropriateness" (2005: 97). Although I agree that (im)polite is a scalar notion, I refrain from accepting the division between *politic* and *polite* behaviour (Watts, 2003) due to the rather vague criteria on which it is based.

Instead, I follow Spencer-Oatey in considering politeness an “umbrella term” (2005: 97) that covers a range of evaluative meanings, representing a continuum, ranging from cultivated and self-effacing through appropriate and socially-correct to such negative connotations as haughty, insincere and rude. Politeness is neither speaker nor hearer oriented, but is a collaborative endeavour involving judgments being made about social relationships, enacted in and constitutive of interaction. Finally, I take a dynamic, interactional approach to the analysis of the corpus material underpinned by the assumptions presented below.

People differ in the socio-cultural baggage they use as a basis for their behavioural expectations about a conversation. Yet, they typically take it for granted that they share the same mechanisms of interpretation of communicative situations and can understand each other. Accordingly, as social agents, they tacitly agree to *trust* each other to “act normally” and treat each other’s actions as instances of “normal, responsible behaviour” (Taylor, 1992: 218) that can build up a rapport. The kind of “social conformity” (Taylor, 1992) established between interlocutors is dynamic. It exists until any one of the participants is faced with a problem and takes some strategic action to resolve it, whereby social conformity is set anew. Conversational partners manage rapport in the course of interaction through different strategies of adaptation, accommodation or compensation to bring their verbal behaviour in conformity with the “inside norms” they have tacitly agreed upon.

These inside norms are jointly constructed through the mutual engagement of all participants in the communicative encounter and are thus locally generated and regulated. They comprise diverse discourse regularities, role specifications and attitudes of social identity that are “distinctive as commonalities relevant to the situation at hand” (Erickson, 1996: 295), and accepted as a kind of a *code of situational co-membership* (CSC) by the respective community of practice. The established CSC is the key factor underpinning participants’ judgments about what should be regarded as “normal, responsible behaviour” whereupon any behavioural act conforming to it counts as ‘appropriate’, regardless of whether or not it appears threatening or imposing, in Brown and Levinson’s terms.

The achievement of mutual understanding and the establishment of CSC is a *public phenomenon* brought about as a constitutive feature of the interaction process itself, consequently, it is also *observable*, hence, *describ-*

*able* by analysts. Given that judgments about what is permitted, prescribed or proscribed (Spencer-Oatey, 2005: 97) will be predominantly based on the established CSC for the situation at hand, socially appropriate acts will largely remain unnoticed. In a way, they will fall under the regular, partly mechanical, exchange of moves serving the local management of the conversational flow, rather than as a form of expression of an interactants' free choice.

In terms of rapport management, acts that maintain rapport on the basis of conformity to CSC will be treated as neutral in terms of (im)politeness. On the other hand, participants' strategic acts aimed at accommodation of behavioural expectations will be qualified as instances of rapport enhancement, hence polite. Contrariwise, if any participant fails to accommodate to the then current CSC or performs an act conceived as socially inappropriate by his/ her conversational partners, then we have an instance of neglected or damaged rapport that could be qualified as impolite. Finally, if CSC is imbalanced in some other way, by a shift in role specifications, or a particular need of social identity, for instance, then an opportunity is provided for renegotiation and restructuring of CSC. Given the objectively existing socio-cultural differences in interlocutors' expectations in cross-cultural communication, we may presume that a large part of the established rapport will be strategically managed. It is interesting to see, however, whether, and in what way, the professional specialization of talk will impact upon their strategic rapport-oriented behaviour.

### **3.1. The data**

The transcript subject of analysis is derived from an audio recorded talk at a working meeting of Bulgarian and British academics involved in a joint project. The aim of the project is to revise the course syllabi and design test specifications for the General English and ELT Methodology courses on a recently launched Applied Linguistics Programme. The meeting is one of a series of working sessions between the Bulgarian and British project partners taking place at a Bulgarian university. That particular session lasts for about eight hours spread over several days and is legitimately audio recorded for the project records.

For the purposes of this analysis I have transcribed a text of a little over twenty five thousand words. The participants in the talk are one British male and eight Bulgarian female language teachers. Although they have all met

before and the Bulgarians actually work in the same department, this is their first involvement in a joint project. For brevity, the British participant is referred to as NS (native speaker), and the Bulgarian teachers as BT1/ 2/ 3 etc. The conversation is held in English and instances of language switch are considered of strategic importance.

### **3.2. Analysis and discussion**

Exploring the motives for rapport management, Spencer-Oatey (2002: 540) establishes as motivational forces relevant to politeness the “management of face”, pertaining to people’s concerns over such personal values as worth, credibility, competence, etc., and “management of sociality rights” bearing on people’s concerns over personal/group entitlements to fairness, consideration, social inclusion/ exclusion, etc. I take this distinction as a basis for dividing the analysis into two sections: one dealing with rapport relationships between participants from a social aspect as members of the particular community of practice; and another from the perspective of individual face management.

The adopted two-step approach is motivated by the belief, also shared by Kasper (1990), that uncovering the relationship between social, psychological and interactional factors known to influence speakers’ communicative performance will provide a deeper insight into politeness. Hopefully, it will also throw light on how participants resolve the controversy caused by, on one hand, the professional orientation of the talk that presumes transactional goals to overrule relational work, and on the other, the cross-cultural communicative setting inviting more active strategic management of rapport.

#### **3.2.1. Management of societal rights**

Speakers embark on a conversation with some expectations about what forms of social behaviour are appropriate to the situation at hand. Their expectations are based on knowledge drawn on different sources: norms of language use, cultural traditions and conventions, social practice norms and personal communicative experience (cf. *base of behavioural expectations*, Spencer-Oatey, 2005: 98). During interaction, however, they do not just reproduce the behaviour deemed as appropriate but continually adjust, reconstruct and accommodate it to the demands of the context. As a result, they fix a kind of framework of what will be regarded permitted

or appropriate behaviour, termed here *code of situational co-membership*. At the level of social relations, CSC commonly includes participants' understandings on role specifications, configurations of roles in terms of position in social space, relationships of distance and power as well as attitudes that might arise from these relationships.

The encounter under study is characterized by a fairly complex configuration of multiple roles. In the first place, the relationships are cross-cultural and professionally oriented. Next, every participant has a well-specified role according to the project specifications they are following. Finally, the relationships relevant to the particular community of practice build on and interpenetrate with relationships between group members existing beforehand. Nevertheless, the participants have managed to work out a fairly distinct distribution of rights and obligations made manifest in their verbal behaviour.

The British participant acts as representative of the partner team responsible for procuring the necessary professional expertise for the project, a guest and the only male representative in the group. These roles have obviously been considered important enough to secure him the highest position in the social role hierarchy within the group, materialized on the level of verbal behaviour in the right to initiate and recapitulate topics for discussion, to pass judgment and have the last say on the right course of action and even to give lecture-like theoretical explanations to moot questions. In the educational domain, most of these actions are commonly connected with exercising more power and would count as face-threatening in Brown and Levinson's terms, but in this particular case, they are in accord with the social space granted to NS's role and, consequently, accepted as part of the routine practice associated with that role. So actions endorsed by a CSC, even if they rank high in terms of imposition due to the high level of power involved, do not cause damage to the established rapport and remain neutral to politeness.

The Bulgarian participant BT1 also performs multiple roles: she is director of the project on the Bulgarian side, head of the department hosting the meeting, and leader of the Bulgarian team. In view of all those roles, she is also allotted more power relative to the rest of Bulgarians, materialized largely in more floor space, the right to distribute floor space amongst her group members and a brusquer and more matter-of-fact tone she imposes on the discussion. Again, her behaviour has not evoked any man-



ifest negative judgments, in spite of the multitude of bald-on-record strategies she utilizes. Although both NS and BT1's roles enjoy high power however, BT1's behaviour seems more ambivalent in terms of politeness depending on whether she addresses the British guest or her colleagues. As I shall discuss later, a possible explanation for this could be that management of social relations is sometimes overruled by the need of protecting individual face-wants.

The other members of the group are course leaders and authors of the materials under consideration. Inasmuch as they are the people best informed about a particular class situation, they are granted more floor space when they present their own materials. Moreover, as people who have firsthand experience of the learning process, they are also those who raise problems or provide information on students. Again, potential threats of the acts performed are neutralized by the fact that they are permitted by CSC. In general, their actions are not associated with high power, but they, too, stick to the more direct, matter-of-fact tone of expression accepted as an in-group norm.

An interesting restructuring of role relationships is observed when the conversation shifts onto a new subject, that of ELT methodology courses, which opens an opportunity for renegotiation of the running CSC. What happens actually is that the Bulgarian teacher in charge of the methodology section, BT4, 'takes the liberty' of giving a rather lengthy presentation on the then running courses, using for the purpose more floor space than the NS himself. On the face of it, it appears as if she is threatening the established rapport: first, because she trespasses on BT1's social space as a group leader, next because she encroaches on the right granted to NS to make the longest presentations.

Nevertheless, the threats appear more apparent than real, as they do not lead to any serious damage of group rapport, obviously due to an adaptation of CSC to the new situation. On closer look, we can see that there was actually some preliminary preparation for the change: BT4 has prepared handouts for her presentation, BT1 has voluntarily stepped back, the subject being out of her academic interests, and finally, BT4 explicitly asks for and gets permission for what is going to happen (e.g.1). So we see that, even in situations where outcomes are more important than relational work, changes in the established code of appropriate behaviour have to be carefully prepared to avoid causing damage to social harmony.

BT4: Perhaps I must tell you about some of the problems as I see them.

NS: Okay.

Summing up, we may conclude that the enactment of roles loaded with more power do not necessarily threaten the social harmony established in a group. Provided that such power-laden behaviour is sanctioned as “normal and responsible” in the then running CSC, it will contribute to the maintenance of rapport by simply being in accord with what has been agreed upon. When changes in the social relationships occur participants would rather change the rules than discard a certain behavioural act as impolite, especially when outcomes are more important than attitudes. Even in those cases however, this tends to happen after careful preparation.

### **3.2.2. Management of face**

Unlike the management of social relationships, where role specifications in terms of rights and obligations are fairly distinct and scrupulously adhered to by participants, the management of face wants on the personality level is less tidy and cross-cultural influences are clearly visible. Politeness researchers working in the tradition of Brown and Levinson commonly emphasize the negotiation aspect of face, that is, participants’ cooperation in maintaining each other’s individual faces in face-threatening situations. The stance taken in this study however is that facework as constitutive of rapport management is rather concerned with identity, that is, the public images that Speaker and Hearer consider “to be in their interest to convey” (Goffman, 1959: 4) as people who can be trusted to act responsibly and in harmony (cf. “quality face”, Spencer-Oatey, 2002: 540).

In most cases, that does not present a communicative problem, since speakers’ acts, instrumentally essential for the maintenance of a rapport, are at the same time perfectly appropriate as a means of conveying the identity claimed by the performer. There are also cases, however, when self-face wants may run counter to established in-group behavioural norms. It is in these latter cases that speakers resort to various ‘involvement and independence strategies’, in the sense of Scollon and Scollon (1995: 36), to balance established in-group norms against their personality wants. Face management is not an end in itself. It is enacted in communication in relation with other aspects of the interaction process and can be explored from different angles. For reasons of space, however, in this paper I shall only dis-

cuss in brief how face management correlates with speakers' achievement of interactional goals and identity protection.

### 3.2.2.1. Face and interactional goals

In order to demonstrate how interactional goals can influence or be influenced by individuals' face wants, I shall consider three excerpts sampled out from different parts of the corpus material. The first one (e.g. 2) is taken from the beginning of the talk and exemplifies how NS is trying to persuade one of the Bulgarian lecturers, BT2, that some of the decisions in her material seem problematic. Following the conventions pertaining to his culture as to what behaviour is appropriate in situations of this kind, he organizes his performance in a manner of non-imposition and respect for his partner's autonomous decisions as a competent and worthy professional.

To achieve his interactional goal, he utilizes an impressive range of resources. He relocates himself from the expert role loaded with power, to a more democratic role of a colleague teacher interested in students (1,4,5,7) and his partner's personal opinion (6) (cf. "point of view flip", Brown and Levinson 1987). Then on the linguistic level, he utilizes a number of strategies — indirectness (8), clarification request (2, 3) confirmation checks (11), manipulative presuppositions (10, 12) and self-effacement (9) — to indirectly imply his negative judgment of the document and thus minimize the threat of face. Notwithstanding NS's skillfully orchestrated performance, his partner does not appear to have grasped his real interactional goal. Realizing that the conversation is falling short of efficiency therefore, NS finally takes the risk of losing face and tables the problem pointblank (13).

#### Example 2

**NS:** *And how does that work in practice? How did they perform on ...*(1)

**BT2:** Well, I think ... what happened was that one and the same thing was assessed twice, first as a... when they have to answer the questions... and second, ... when they have to write sentences of their own. Because ... this is actually the task, **answering** questions and stating opinions. So, both exercises were based on their reading comprehension.

**NS:** *Okay. But not on the ... not on the Reading Comprehension part .* (2)

**BT2:** No, no.

**NS:** *So, you get assessed twice. One in terms of content, one in terms of the ... the expression of opinion* (3)

**BT2:** Yes.

**NS:** Errr

**BT2:** I think ... I ... I made up my mind to cut the questions and keep the ... only the ... actual production of opinion.

**NS:** Okay. Did they develop ... *How did they compare to their performance in the other bits?* (4)

**BT2:** That was the weakest side.

**NS:** *How did they feel about that?* (5) *Did you ask them?* (6) *Did they feel that they were prepared for this and were not ...?*(7)

**TB2:** It was difficult

.....

**NS:** ... *Perhaps the simplification for the writing should be simplified for year two and made slightly more complex for year three ...*(8) What about their freedom in terms of ... writing... uhm, *I got lost on that one ..* (9) In year three ...yeah ... *Probably ... what they have to do is summarize a text, which is a type of writing ability, but that ... constitutes a part of the reading ...*(10)

**BT2:** [Yeah

**NS:** [exercise in fact. . [...] *So, in practical terms there is, as it were, a reading paper which incorporates a kind of a writing exercise.*(11) Errr (...) And that's it. *There wasn't any ... there wasn't any place for writing in the 'Use of English' ... in year three?*(12)

... ..

**NS:** Yeah. Okay. **What I see as a problem is that ... we've got sort of labels which mean different things at different times. (13)**

Why, one might ask, did NS fail to achieve his interactional goal when he had structured his performance in full accord with his expectations of what is appropriate? The answer emerges a few minutes later, when the same issue is tackled by the Bulgarians (e.g. 3) and the interactants go freely bald-on record (1,2,3,4,5,6), without a hint of concern over a damaged rapport.

### Example 3

**BT2:** Actually they don't do anything else with this text ... they just read the text... and there were questions and summary but I didn't write the questions for the same purpose that I explained for the second year ... because the same thing is actually assessed twice. So,...it's only one text which has to be summarized and that's all. [...]

**BT1:** *I don't quite agree, frankly speaking... because there are texts and texts. It's a matter of difficulty ... not the same task (1)*

**BT2:** Yes, but if you have to assess once ... their comprehension through the questions ... and twice... their comprehension through the summary ... *there is no reason ... (2)*

**BT1:** *No, I don't believe so. (3) In the first case you assess [...]*

**BT2:** So, if the form is good and they have not understood the text .... Can we give them a very high mark on the summary?

**BT1:** Well, *this is a completely different matter (4)* whether you should use the same text for the summary and the comprehension questions..

**BT2:** *That's it. (5) That's why I use one text which they read ... [...]*

**BT1:** *For me they are different skills, (6) frankly speaking.*

Comparing the two exchanges, it becomes evident that the conversational partners must certainly have assessed the situation differently, probably influenced by their own cultures. The Bulgarians have given precedence to practical outcomes playing down concerns about personal face wants. Consequently, they have judged the situation as fully justifying a more direct, matter-of-fact style of speaking. Despite the prevalence of bald-on-record strategies in their speech performance therefore, rapport is maintained because interactants' stances on what is permitted fully coincide.

In the first exchange (e.g. 2) contrariwise, rapport seems seriously challenged, since partners' expectations of what is appropriate to the particular situation manifestly go at cross purposes. While trying to direct his partner to a certain goal, NS also makes strategic efforts to convey an impression of his own personality as someone who doesn't like to be imposing. Face management however falls out of BT2's expectations, if we judge by her behaviour in exchange (3): she takes NS's cues at face value as genuine interest in students' performance, hence an indirect endorsement of her stance. This, as we see, causes the native speaker to switch into a more direct mode of speaking at the expense of losing some face.

The discrepancy between the ways interactants manage their face wants could well have grown into a disruption of in-group social harmony, if some kind of accommodation of strategies had not taken place. After all, misunderstanding of this kind will always bring about awkwardness and frustration and in a way discredit the person who has caused it, as someone who cannot be trusted. As seen from example (4), however, in the particular case NS prevents this from happening by quickly switching into a more

direct style of speaking. Evidently, he must have considered the achievement of his interactional goals and upholding in-group comity as a strong enough motive for a shift in face management, even if that might be at the cost of his culturally construed self-image.

#### **Example 4**

**NS:** This means that in fact *you don't distinguish between* the kind of task that you expect them to do.

**BT4:** Although according to the programme there should be a distinction between the two courses because ...

**NS:** A-ha, the distinction is maybe in terms of content, or focus ...

**BT4:** [ yes, content...

**NS:** Yes, so *these do not deal with progression.... these are so to say, subject specific....*

Winding up, we could surmise that in real life use, face strategies do not seem to be judged on whether or not they are (im)polite, but on how they contribute to the maintenance or enhancement of in-group rapport and representation of one's identity. Accordingly, it is misleading to predefine face strategies as (im)polite out of context. As pointed, bald-on-record strategies may be judged as appropriate, whereas strategies commonly labeled polite may threaten the social equilibrium depending on whether or not partners share the same assessment of the particular situation.

Moreover, in a highly task-focused discourse, where the need for clarity, brevity and efficiency overrules face concerns, the strategies utilized by conversational partners may not be polite in traditional terms, yet positively valued for contributing to social harmony and support in the group. Finally, evidence suggests that perhaps the role of socio-culturally motivated politeness is not that big in naturally occurring interactions as participants easily change strategies and accommodate to management strategies prevalent in the group if they deem that to be in the interest of communicative efficiency or in-group solidarity (also established by Cook, 2006: 272).

#### **3.2.2.2. Politeness and self-face protection**

In the preceding discussion, it was shown how speakers adapt the role they enact to the CSC agreed upon as a pre-condition for the equilibrium in partners' face wants and sociality rights needed for efficient interaction. But speakers have also to think of their *personal identity*, the self-image they

want to display with the expectation that it will be evaluated as socially positive by their partners. A large part of this self-presentation is diffused through interaction quite unconsciously, especially when the projected 'role' identity is consistent with speakers' self-concept and self-respect. Although dialectically interconnected, however, one's personal and enacted images represent different facets of identity (Hecht, 2005) and conflicts between them are possible and real.

The examined speech situation contains moments of conflicting identities, so to say, by default where speakers need to resort to defensive strategies to protect their personal identity. On the one hand, identity splits may arise by the presence of power-laden roles that may be in disagreement with the self-image speakers want to project of themselves in interaction; on the other, cross-cultural differences may lead to misinterpretation of identity signals. This is particularly relevant to the roles enacted by NS and BT1 which by being directly associated with such values as achievement, leadership, direction and control allow a more forceful, bald-on-record behaviour.

As shown in examples (2) and (3), this is the style of speaking favoured by the Bulgarians, who seem to find it natural and in accord with the communicative context. Although their English interlocutor also accommodates to the established in-group norms in order to enhance his communicative effectivity, he doesn't seem to judge them as being in accord with his personal face-wants. This becomes obvious from the beginning of the conversation, where he tries to project his self-image of a democratic, open-minded, considerate and sensitive person, who is not inclined to coerce or impose decisions on his conversational partners.

The public image he wants to impress on his conversational partners, however, seems to run counter to the established in-group behavioural norms which, as commented, would have led to some negative consequences for the achievement of his interactional goals if he had not accommodated. Yet, accommodation to the situation at hand does not automatically lead to fully abandoning one's personal identity. Corpus evidence shows that whenever he deems it possible, NS dissociates from his expert role and makes whatever he is saying consistent with his personal face-wants, using for this purpose a wide repertoire of 'defense' strategies — subjectivization, indirectness, giving options, self-effacement, etc. (e.g. 5).

**Example 5**

**NS:** That I think is something that we have to think over. I think from my point of view as a student I'm finding it a bit confusing. (Point- of- view deixis and impersonalization)

....

**NS:** *That's the position as I see it...* (Subjectivization)

....

**NS:** *Let's say 40. But you can decide and make them 50 or less probably ( giving options)*

...

**NS:** Again I think, if you are not sure about what to do, the best thing to do is devise a mock test and give it to people and see how they perform (Making suggestions rather than coercing partners into a decision)

Taken at face value, the strategies NS uses are not very different from Brown and Levison's politeness strategies and we could say that they are motivated by his desire to be polite. However, it doesn't make much sense for someone to want to be polite to people who clearly favour a more direct style of speaking, in a context that does not, in the main, require polite behaviour. That is why, I consider such strategies as focused on one's personal identity. They serve to secure the speaker the right of a 'personal voice' and cultural individuality. They make manifest his creativity in simultaneously developing in-group solidarity and "having his own show".

A similar split of identity can be discerned in BT1's performance as well. In her enacted role of group leader, she is rather bossy and curt. At times, however, she also tries to bring to light her personal identity of someone less self-assertive, more group-dependent and cooperative, of someone who has her doubts and needs support (e.g. 6).

**Example 6**

**BT1:** I don't know, maybe... maybe my colleagues will say why it doesn't make sense ... you know, we always focus on grammar, on the importance of grammar, and we do a lot of grammar things, and give the highest weighting to grammar, errr but I don't ... I don't like it. I think, really, that 'use of English' should have the same weighting as 'Reading' ... Hm? Aiche, what do you think?



This strategy is most consistently followed in her relationship with NS, where BT1 prefers to withdraw to a 'group member' position and foreground her self-image of a non-domineering and respectful person (e.g. 7). Thus she manages to avoid potential leadership clashes and enhance the rapport between the two leading figures.

**Example 7:**

**BT1:** Excuse me, G. *Could I ask a question* before you summarize the generalities?

**NS:** Yeah.

**BT1:** Is it really very important where our writing task is as long as we have included a writing task? [...] (asking for advice)

So, both NS and BT1 utilize protection strategies to impress on others self-concepts that deviate in some respect from the roles they have to play. However, their strategies tend to differ in orientation. NS's preferences commonly go for independence strategies by means of which he tries to dissociate himself from the rest of the group whenever he feels that he is not threatening group solidarity with his action. Contrariwise, BT1 gives prominence to her personal identity through involvement strategies and group inclusion. That is, she tries to enhance the socially positive value of her self-image by projecting herself as someone finding support in the group to which she belongs.

Languagewise, the strategies she employs are not very different from those used by NS and may count as politeness strategies in Brown and Levinson's terms. Yet, such a definition would not tie in well with her prevalent direct style of speaking. That is why I am more inclined to think that by foregrounding aspects of her personal identity, BT1 actually tries to neutralize the power attributed to her role and humanize the interaction process, thus enhancing social harmony within the group. These examples lend further support to the expressed view that it may be misleading to pre-define strategies as (im)polite out of context. Not only because strategies acquire politeness meanings as constitutive elements of interaction, but also because, in addition to politeness, these strategies may have other interactional functions as well.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In this paper I have considered (im)politeness as concomitant of a broader category of rapport management and explored the factors that may influence the use of (im)polite forms in an academic context. For the purposes of analysis I have employed a discursive approach which has brought into relief the complex interplay of social, psychological and interactional factors involved in simultaneously achieving high communicative effectiveness and maintaining a rapport among conversational partners.

On the societal level concerned with social role relationships, it was established that speakers' judgments of (im)polite speech behaviour are determined by the specific code of situational co-membership established among interlocutors. Changes in role relationships tend to be carefully prepared and backed by a corresponding readjustment of the then current CSC and are not likely to lead to impoliteness judgments that may affect negatively communicative efficiency. Rather than treat management of face wants as a negotiation process between speaker and hearer focused on saving each other's images, it has been considered as constitutive of interaction, dialectically interdependent with its other elements.

Upon analyzing at greater length the relationship of face management to communicative efficiency and speakers' personal identity in the speech event under consideration, it was established that in contexts characterized by clear transactional goals and well-defined outcomes, self-face wants tend to be outweighed by interactional goals. This accounts for the high occurrence of accommodation strategies that, given the cross-cultural context of the examined situation, serve to neutralize culturally laden features in speakers' communicative behaviour and uphold in-group solidarity and rapport.

Wherever social harmony is not deemed as threatened, however, speakers would back off from accommodation and utilize face management as a defense mechanism instead, to project the self-images they want their partners to see and evaluate and thus add a personal touch to the conversation. Against this backdrop, it is concluded that the role of face-management is much more complex than mere negotiation of positive and negative face wants whereupon it seems unproductive to predefine strategies as (im)polite out of context. Politeness is not inherent in particular linguistic structures or speech acts, but is enacted and constitutive of interaction.

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**POLITE INTERACTION OR COOPERATIVE INTERACTION?  
BREE'S CONVERSATIONAL STYLE IN ABC'S  
*DESPERATE HOUSEWIVES***

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**Abstract:** *The paper analyses the character of Bree Van de Kamp, one of the protagonists of the American TV series Desperate Housewives, and some of the conversations in the pilot show in which she participates. In particular, I examine her conversational style, interactional behaviour and politeness and cooperation strategies towards her family and neighbours through the theoretical frameworks of Leech's Politeness principle and Grice's Cooperative principle. Linguistic investigation reveals her unbalanced personality. The conversational means she uses not only produce a perlocutionary effect of distance from the other, but also lay bare her traditional ideology and the mainstream female role model she struggles to incarnate: on the one hand she communicates her obsessive compulsion to behave in this way, and on the other hand her psychosis and her loss of contact with reality, two mental states attributable to the impossibility of fully personifying an allegedly perfect female role model.*

**Keywords:** *conversation analysis, Grice's cooperative principle and maxims, language and gender, Leech's politeness principles, stylistics.*

## **1. Introduction**

One of the characters in the American TV series *Desperate Housewives* (2004-onwards), produced by ABC, is Bree Van de Kamp. Bree, who is in her early forties, is a model wife, mother and housewife who lives with her family — her husband Rex and her teenage children Danielle and Andrew — in an elegant suburban middle-class home. Her main personality traits are rigorous perfectionism and uncommon refinement, especially in performing her domestic chores, which arouses admiration in her neighbours but, since it verges on obsessive compulsion, also estrangement in her family — to take a random example from the pilot show, whereas Danielle and Andrew would prefer plain cooking, she serves basil puree

and osso buco for dinner (cf. McCabe-Akass, 2006, Richardson, 2006; cf. also Gill, 2007; Johnson, 2007).

In my paper, I will analyse the character of Bree and some of the conversations in the pilot show of the series in which she participates. In particular, through the theoretical framework of Leech's Politeness principle (Leech, 1983; cf. also Brown-Levinson, 1987; Holmes, 1995; Mills, 2003; Lakoff, 2004; Bousfield-Locher, 2008) and Grice's Cooperative principle (Grice, 1975), but also through other linguistic tools provided by conversation analysis (Culpeper-Short-Verdonk, 1998; Kitzinger, 2000; Kitzinger, 2008), pragmatics (Levinson, 1983; Christie, 2000; Grundy, 2000) and stylistics (Mills, 1995; Short, 1996; Douthwaite, 2000; Lazar, 2005; Leech-Short, 2007), I will examine her conversational style, interactional behaviour and politeness and cooperation strategies towards her family and neighbours.

Firstly, I will describe the specific ways in which Bree flouts either Leech's Politeness principle or Grice's Cooperative principle or both, in other words how she swings between politeness and impoliteness, cooperativeness and uncooperativeness to forge her identity as a perfect woman. Secondly, I will study the conversational implicatures triggered by her floutings of these principles and maxims, and I will try to identify the interactional strategies she employs to build, maintain and develop her relationships with her addressees, in order to reveal the ideology behind them and the value system embodied by the refined female figure of Bree.

My investigation will be conducted on the text of the pilot show which I transcribed from the video recording, but the interpretations offered of each sequence are also based on and confirmed by the paralinguistic and non-linguistic signals discernible on the screen. In cases where alternative interpretations spring naturally to mind, I will make reference to such signals in order to bolster my reading against alternatives which appear to be plausible when only the text of the transcription is taken into consideration (which may be hypothesised as constituting the position of the majority of the readers of this article).

The sequences in the pilot where she features can be divided into two types: on the one hand, those where she interacts with her friends Gabrielle, Lynette and Susan, the other *desperate housewives*; on the other hand, those where she communicates either with all or some of the members of her family, or with her neighbours in the presence of her family. Since she is usually polite and cooperative in the former sequences, in this

paper I will analyse some of her utterances from the latter, namely her interaction with and behaviour towards her husband, children and neighbours, in order to investigate her relationship with them. The first of four sequences is set at the Youngs' house during the wake over Mary Alice, Bree's suicidal friend and neighbour, and the first-person narrator of the TV series; the second at the Van de Kamps' house over dinner; the third at a restaurant after the family has ordered their meal; the fourth in Rex's room at the hospital, where he has been rushed to due to an allergy.

In the four sequences, Bree utters 26 turns; given that the 5 longest can be split up into two parts, each categorised by linguistic (i.e. topic) and paralinguistic (i.e. intonation) signals, the resulting 31 strings will be taken into account; 6 (19.35%) are uttered at the wake, 8 (25.81%) at the Van de Kamps', 13 (41.94%) at the restaurant, 4 (12.90%) at the hospital. When studied through the theoretical frameworks provided by the Politeness and Cooperative principles, Bree's 31 strings can be divided into 4 basic types:

- Type-a strings: complying with both Principles (7 strings, 22.58% of the total string count);
- Type-b strings: flouting both Principles (13 strings, 41.94% of the total string count);
- Type-c strings: complying with the Politeness principle whilst flouting cooperation (4 strings, 12.90% of the total string count);
- Type-d strings: complying with the Cooperative principle whilst flouting politeness (7 strings, 22.58% of the total string count).

## 2. Analysis

### 2.1. Bree vs. Rex: [+Politeness, –Cooperation]

Although the least recurring type with 4 strings and 12.90% of the total string count, Bree's complying with politeness whilst flouting cooperation (type-c strings) is the most ideologically significant type, not only because she oscillates between seeming politeness and actual uncooperativeness, therefore impoliteness, but also because she addresses all of the 4 strings to Rex (the first 2 at the restaurant, the last 2 at the hospital). The first instance of this type to be found in the pilot show is drawn from the restaurant sequence:

#### Example 1

*At the restaurant.*

[1.1] **Rex.** I want a divorce. I just can't live in this ... this detergent commercial anymore. [S]

**[1.2] Waiter.** The salad bar's right over there, help yourself. **[O]**

**[1.3] Rex.** Thank you. **[A]**

**[1.4] Bree.** Um, I think I'll go get your salad for you. **[D1] [...]**

**[1.5] Bree.** Okay, well I got you the honey mustard dressing. The ranch looked just a little bit suspect. **[D2]**

**S** = statement, **O** = offer, **A** = acceptance, **D** = disagreement

In turn 1.4 (“Um, I think I’ll go get your salad for you.”), by offering to fetch Rex’s salad, Bree applies the Generosity maxim (minimise benefit to self, maximise cost to self) and, apparently, the Relevance maxim (be relevant), since her turn amplifies the subject of the salad at the adjacency pair (turns 1.2 and 1.3), which is composed of an offer by the waiter (O, “The salad bar’s right over there, help yourself.”) and an acceptance by Rex (A, “Thank you.”). Nevertheless, it is inferable from the context that Rex cares less about the topic of the salad than about that of their divorce, which he introduces through the statement in 1.1 (S, “I want a divorce. I just can’t live in this ... this detergent commercial anymore.”), a statement structurally requiring agreement or disagreement by his wife.

Furthermore, because the adjacency pair O-A can be analysed as a non-standard insertion sequence between Rex’s statement and Bree’s required (dis)agreement, in accordance with the pattern of the insertion sequence itself, after the O-A sequence has intervened, Bree is assumed to explicitly agree or disagree with her husband about their divorce, not to offer to bring him some food. That her politeness and cooperation strategies are deliberate and not accidental is confirmed by their reiteration in 1.5 (“Okay, well [...] a little bit suspect”): back to their booth with his salad, she resumes discussing his food and its dressing, and does not approach the subject of their divorce.

As a result, in her turns 1.4 and 1.5, Bree actually flouts the Relevance maxim in order to observe the Agreement maxim (minimise disagreement between self and other, maximise agreement between self and other), and triggers the implicature that not only does she disagree with Rex (D1 and D2), but also her opinion is so different from his that she does not even refer to the subject of divorce. What is more, together with the linguistic signals emitted in her turns, she also rebuffs separation with non-linguistic signals. By fetching him his salad with a smile on her face, and by emphasising that she has selected the healthiest dressing for him, she carries out what she considers to be her duties as a mainstream caring wife with the attitude she



regards as the most appropriate one; she thereby highlights her viewpoint on the indissolubility of marriage and her distance, both linguistic and ideological, from her husband.

Her conversational and non-conversational behaviour and her adherence to the Politeness principle while flouting cooperation consequently disclose her conventional worldview and her conservative perspective on gender roles, mostly on the female role: the ideal woman and wife should always be polite, mainly negatively polite, towards her husband and, by extension, their family and neighbours, lavish affection and tenderness on them, and avoid conflicts and arguments, although she may be reduced to silence and uncooperativeness.

## 2.2. First [+Politeness, +Cooperation], then [–Politeness, – Cooperation]: Bree vs. Paul and Zachary

The scrutiny of Bree's politeness and cooperation strategies so far may suggest that, when she obeys both principles (type-a strings), her addressees should smell a rat. In fact, of the 7 strings which comply with both (22.58% of the total string count), 4 immediately precede one or more strings *flouting* both (type-b strings); this implies that, of the 13 strings which flout both (41.94% of the total string count, that is to say the most recurring type), 6 follow one or more strings *applying* both. The whole wake sequence, which also includes her first turns in the TV series, consists of the first example of this combination. As is usual at wakes, Bree has brought some food, that is to say two baskets of cakes, which she presents to Paul and Zachary, Mary Alice's husband and son respectively, as she offers her condolences:

### Example 2

*At the Youngs' house during the wake over Mary Alice.*

[2.1] **Bree.** Paul. Zachary.

[2.2] **Zachary.** Hello, Mrs. Van De Kamp.

[2.3] **Paul.** Bree, you shouldn't have gone to all this trouble.

[2.4] **Bree.** [2.4a] It was no trouble at all. [2.4b] Now the basket with the red ribbon is filled with desserts for your guests. But the one with the blue ribbon is just for you and Zachary. It's got rolls, muffins, breakfast type things.

[2.5] **Paul.** Thank you.

**[2.6] Bree. [2.6a]** Well, the least I could do is make sure you boys had a decent meal to look forward to in the morning. **[2.6b]** I know you're out of your minds with grief.

**[2.7] Paul.** Yes, we are.

**[2.8] Bree.** Of course, I will need the baskets back once you're done.

**[2.9] Paul.** Of course.

In turn 2.1 and string 2.4a, namely in her first utterances in the sequence, Bree applies both the Politeness and Cooperative principles. In particular, in turn 2.1 ("Paul. Zachary."), whilst adhering to Grice's four maxims, she fully observes Leech's Sympathy maxim (minimise antipathy between self and other, maximise sympathy between self and other) by being politely reticent about her expressions of condolences, i.e. by uttering Mary Alice's husband's and son's names only, therefore avoiding alluding directly to her friend's death and to her own regret. Moreover, in her string 2.4a ("It was no trouble at all."), while continuing to obey Grice's maxims, Bree concurrently complies with Leech's maxims of Generosity and of Modesty (minimise praise of self, maximise dispraise of self): in fact, as Mary Alice says in one of her narratorial comments, she generously "brought baskets of muffins she baked from scratch" to the wake, and modestly denies the effort she put into cooking those desserts.

However, despite her polite and cooperative utterances and behaviour, an attentive spectator should detect a jarring note. Let us take into account only bipolar Politeness maxims, viz. those centred on either the other or the self (Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty); accordingly, we will not bear in mind unipolar Politeness maxims, viz. those centred on both the other and the self (Agreement and Sympathy). As mentioned above, in string 2.4a Bree applies the maxims of Generosity and of Modesty, whilst in turn 1.4 that of Generosity, thus evoking her preference for the bipolar maxims centred on the self.

In addition, let us take into consideration the four sequences in the pilot and the other 8 strings where she observes the Politeness principle: of the 8 strings, 5 adhere to the bipolar maxims, 4 of them obey either the maxim of Generosity or that of Modesty, and only 1 of them that of Approbation (minimise dispraise of other, maximise praise of other). As a result, Bree's reiterated preference for the bipolar maxims and her view of politeness as especially centred on the self may, on the one hand, signal her proper and respectable social and linguistic behaviour, which usually

seems to be generous and modest; yet, on the other hand, it may suggest her fastidiousness, consequently her selfishness and narcissism. This conduct may also encode extreme negative politeness and distance from the other, namely both from her neighbours, who reckon her to be a woman who is perfect but aloof, and from her family, in whose opinion she is a person who is unemotional and who avoids tenderness.

Accordingly, politeness centred on the self paves the way for impoliteness and uncooperativeness. In Example 2, the 2 strings complying with Leech's and Grice's principles (2.1 and 2.4a) are followed by 4 strings which flout them. In 2.4b ("Now the basket [...] breakfast type things."), Bree flouts the Quantity maxim (1. make your contribution as informative as is required; 2. do not make your contribution more informative than is required) by describing the baskets she has brought, their contents and their intended addressees. Therefore, by emphasising how thoughtful her act is (intended illocutionary force) she flouts the Modesty maxim and does not minimise praise of self; furthermore, she ignores the Sympathy maxim and does not minimise antipathy between self and other by depicting her baskets and their contents to her neighbours at their wife's and mother's wake and by telling them what to do with them.

It might be objected that the utterance could convey other illocutionary forces than the one hypothesised above. For example, part of Bree's idiosyncratic knowledge is that Paul and Zachary like rolls and muffins very much, hence the implicature of the utterance in question might also be that she has purposely brought something special for them in an attempt to diminish the intensity of their grief. Stated differently, she seems to be underscoring her wish to express her condolences. However, as anticipated in the introduction, my interpretation is based not only on the verbal signals (the transcription of the text, reproduced above) and on knowledge of the world (in this specific instance that, in any case, gestures of this kind are totally inappropriate when proffering one's condolences to the family of the departed person), but also based on the paralinguistic and non-verbal behavioural signals in the video. In this instance, Bree gesticulates grossly, waving her arms, to indicate first one then the other basket, as well as overdoing the intonation patterns, (saliency), almost reducing the scene to slapstick comedy — the very opposite of the decorum socially required at wakes — while, ironically, she is actually convinced that her behaviour is indeed fully appropriate to the social context, thereby bringing to light her

serious psychological and behavioural problems, of which she is obviously totally unaware.

Bree's string 2.4b is the first in a pragmatic crescendo of impoliteness and uncooperativeness, where she repeats and expands the interactional strategies just examined. Turn 2.4, mostly string 2.4b, is a complex speech act which indirectly indicates her expectation of a similarly complex intended perlocutionary effect, i.e. that her neighbours, although at their wife's and mother's wake, will warmly express thanks for and extol her 'generosity' and 'modesty' along with her considerateness and skill at household activities. Given that Paul's turn 2.5 ("Thank you.") merely acknowledges her gift, and that he thereby does not fully satisfy the particular face wants she conveys in 2.4b, she reinforces her speech act in 2.4b and tries to achieve her intended perlocutionary effect by uttering string 2.6a ("Well, the least I could do is make sure you boys had a decent meal to look forward to in the morning.").

In string 2.6a, Bree flouts the same Politeness and Cooperative maxims as in 2.4b, viz. Quantity, Modesty and Sympathy: by providing the unsolicited and incongruous detail of the purpose of some of her muffins (namely, offering her neighbours their breakfast), and by assuming that her desserts can relieve her neighbours' pain, she resumes underlining her alleged thoughtfulness and unwittingly disregarding their suffering. In string 2.6b ("I know you're out of your minds with grief."), Bree confirms her unfeeling social and linguistic conduct towards Paul and Zachary by interacting in the opposite way to the manner she acted in turn 2.1.

Whereas in that turn she was essential in her condolences, thereby complying with the Sympathy maxim as well as with the Quantity maxim, in this string she flouts both, by not minimising antipathy between self and other, and by making her contribution more informative than is required: just as it is impolite to maintain that she presupposes Mary Alice's husband and son are suffering, so too it is uncooperative to state her neighbours' emotions which, at the dead woman's wake, are obviously suggested by one's encyclopaedic knowledge of the world, that is common to all of the participants in the conversation and to all of their spectators — bar Bree. Thus Bree immediately confirms her inability to comprehend and adhere to social behavioural norms, including pertinent, emotional behaviour (viz. having the requisite thoughts and feelings, as Austin states in his felicity con-

ditions governing the successful achievement of a speech act — indeed, here her act naturally misfires).

Bree reaches her pragmatic crescendo and her climax in the ‘baskets affair’ — her last turn in the sequence, 2.8 (“Of course, I will need the baskets back once you’re done.”), where she flouts her familiar maxims of Sympathy and of Quantity. Firstly, she continues to ignore her neighbours’ sorrow by dealing with the idle topic of her baskets; secondly, she performs the request that Paul and Zachary should return them soon, a request which could have been avoided (again, in accordance with the encyclopaedic knowledge of the world, when someone is lent something, s/he commonly gives it back in due course), or at least postponed (should her neighbours have forgotten to return them).

The fact that Bree first applies the Politeness and Cooperative principles and then flouts them both provides further information about her value system and about her standpoint on gender and gender roles. As she observes Leech’s and Grice’s maxims, she (re)presents herself as a model speaker and, by extension, model woman, who interacts in the most suitable way during the speech event and with its participants, and who follows social and linguistic behaviour patterns specific to a traditional white middle-class ideology and its stereotypical female figure. Nevertheless, her perfectionism leads her to overdo things and to become overscrupulous. As a result, she mainly flouts the maxim of Modesty (attempting to be flattered by her neighbours), that of Sympathy (indirectly expressing that she cannot feel deep solidarity and friendship with them), and that of Quantity (offering uninvited details about her muffins). Moreover, one of the reasons behind her floutings is her lack of encyclopaedic knowledge of the world, or her inability to use it, which appears to signal that her social and linguistic behaviour is beyond rational control, and that her desire to embody a female figure faithfully preserving the *status quo* borders on psychosis.

### **2.3. From [–Politeness, +Cooperation] to [–Politeness, –Cooperation]: Bree vs. Danielle and Andrew**

While Bree adopts two distinct conversational behaviour patterns towards Rex and towards her neighbours — she is frequently polite and uncooperative towards the former (type-c strings), first polite and cooperative (type-a strings), then impolite and uncooperative (type-b strings) towards the latter —, in the sequences at the Van de Kamps’ and at the

restaurant, she reserves a third conversational pattern for Danielle and Andrew. This is realised by one or more strings which flout the Politeness principle and adhere to the Cooperative principle (type-d strings), followed by one or more strings flouting both (type-b strings). In more detail, of the 7 strings which belong to type d (22.58% of the total string count), 5 are followed by type-b strings, whereas 5 of the 13 type-b strings (41.94% of the total string count) are preceded by type-d strings. All of the instances of type d + type b, bar one, are comprised in the sequence at the Van de Kamps':

### Example 3

*At the Van de Kamps' house over dinner.*

**[3.1] Danielle.** Why can't we ever have normal soup?

**[3.2] Bree.** Danielle, there is nothing abnormal about basil puree.

**[3.3] Danielle.** Just once, can we have a soup that people have heard of? Like French onion or navy bean?

**[3.4] Bree.** First of all, your father can't eat onions. He's deadly allergic. And I won't even dignify your navy bean suggestion. So, how's the osso buco?

**[3.5] Andrew.** It's OK.

**[3.6] Bree.** It's OK? Andrew, I spent three hours cooking this meal. How do you think it makes me feel when you say, "It's OK" in that sullen tone?

**[3.7] Andrew.** Who asked you to spend three hours on dinner?

**[3.8] Bree.** Excuse me?

**[3.9] Andrew.** Tim Harper's mom gets home from work, pops open a can of pork and beans, and boom, they're eating, everyone's happy.

**[3.10] Bree.** You'd rather I serve pork and beans?

**[3.11] Danielle.** Apologize now, I am begging.

**[3.12] Andrew.** I'm saying, do you always have to serve cuisine? Can't we ever just have food?

**[3.13] Bree.** Are you doing drugs?

**[3.14] Andrew.** What?

**[3.15] Bree.** Change in behaviour is one of the warning signs, and you have been as fresh as paint for the last six months. That certainly would explain why you're always locked in the bathroom.

**[3.16] Danielle.** Trust me, that is not what he is doing.

**[3.17] Andrew.** Shut up. Mom, I'm not the one with the problem here, alright? You're the one always acting like she's running for mayor of Stepford.

**[3.18] Bree.** Rex, seeing as you're the head of this household, I would really appreciate you saying something.

**[3.19] Rex.** Pass the salt?

Bree's first two turns in the sequence (3.2 and 3.4) are addressed to Danielle, and are composed of type-d strings. In the turns, she is cooperative by obeying all of Grice's maxims but, by flouting Leech's maxims of Agreement (in both turns) and of Approbation (in turn 3.4), she is not fully polite. Such social and linguistic behaviour may partly fall within the schema of standard parent-child (in particular teenage child) interaction, for it is typified by disagreement over an aspect of everyday family life, by dispraise of the other's preferences, but also by the will to cooperate despite such disagreement and dispraise. However, Bree's turns and politeness selections give prominence to and indirectly approve her own refined tastes as the norm against her daughter's and family's, thus constituting a source of conflict, which sparks off her subsequent choice of type-b strings.

Of Bree's other 6 turns, all bar 3.18 are addressed to Andrew. Whilst both of her turns to Danielle consist of type-d strings, 2 of her 5 turns to Andrew are equally realised by type-d strings, but 3 by type-b strings; since the former comply with the Cooperative principle, and the latter flout both the Politeness and the Cooperative principles, Bree's linguistic choices suggest a less conflictual relationship with her daughter than with her son. Even her first turn to Andrew in the sequence (3.6, "It's OK? [...] that sullen tone?") is a type-b string. Here she flouts the Quantity maxim by providing the unnecessary piece of information about the long cooking time of her meal; through this, she highlights both her domestic effort and the sophistication of her food, indirectly trying to win her family's approbation and consequently flouting the Modesty maxim too. What emerges most forcefully here is her self-centredness.

On the surface, all her turns addressed to Andrew may at first appear to be only face-threatening acts (FTAs) directed at him. Closer scrutiny, however, reveals that they parallel turn 3.6, namely the major function of these utterances is not so much criticism of her son, as mainly self-defence against his attacks through indirect modes of self-praise. The same stricture applies to the utterances directed to her daughter and husband.

Thus, despite being FTAs against Andrew, Bree's turns 3.8 ("Excuse me?") and 3.10 ("You'd rather I serve pork and beans?") are composed of type-d strings, viz., because they apply the Cooperative principle, they do not seem to be fully threatening. Accordingly, just like her utterances addressed to Danielle, they may constitute standard parent-child interac-

tion, characterised as they are by the unsurprising flouting of the Agreement maxim about family life issues, as well as by cooperation and the wish to participate in a conversation to discuss those issues.

Yet, apart from the observance of Grice's maxims and the predictable disagreement between mother and son, through the FTA in turn 3.8, Bree flouts the Sympathy maxim: as the following turns will underscore, her addressing Andrew in a hostile way triggers the implicature that she feels little or no solidarity towards or understanding of the boy. Moreover, in turn 3.10, she also flouts the Modesty maxim by indirectly indicating that a plain dish such as pork and beans does not suit her refined cooking preferences and abilities, therefore establishing and underlining her identity as the ideal housewife and woman, much superior to the norm — as exemplified by Tim Harper's mom.

Although Andrew's utterances in response to Bree's are as face-threatening as his mother's (cf. his turns 3.7, 3.9, 3.12), one of their illocutionary forces expressed is that he and his family would prefer a less 'perfect' and less 'cool' mother and wife. Nevertheless, she fails to notice this criticism and turns from type-d strings to the more face-threatening type-b strings in turns 3.13 and 3.15 to Andrew and 3.18 to Rex. In the former turns ("Are you doing drugs?", "Change in behaviour [...] in the bathroom"), as her son has omitted to flatter her as indirectly requested in her turns 3.6 and 3.10 (those flouting the Modesty maxim), she flouts Leech's Approbation maxim and dispraises him, as if in retaliation, by accusing him of being on drugs (turn 3.13) and by portraying the supposed evidence of such behaviour (turn 3.15). One of the linguistic means she employs to achieve her goal of blaming him is offering unrelated (turn 3.13) and unnecessary (turn 3.15) details about his alleged addiction, thereby flouting Grice's maxims of Relevance and of Quantity.

After Andrew's last attempt to deal with Bree's obsession with perfectionism through turn 3.17 ("Shut up [...] mayor of Stepford"), and after his mother has again missed its main illocutionary force (analysing her defects and not reproaching her with them), she addresses Rex with her turn 3.18, her last in the sequence ("Rex, seeing as you're the head of this household, I would really appreciate you saying something."). The turn, which is a type-b string, has the illocutionary force of requesting her husband's support by flouting both the Politeness and the Cooperative principles. On the one hand, she indirectly tries not only to elicit expressions of admiration from



him, but also to get him to side with her against their son, thus not adhering to Leech's Modesty maxim. On the other hand, she does not obey Grice's maxims of Manner (submaxims 1. avoid obscurity, and 3. be brief) and of Relevance with her complex linguistic exponent, preferred to a simpler expression such as "Rex, say something.", and with the apparently unconnected piece of information about Rex's position in their family.

However, although unnecessarily prolix and partly irrelevant, Bree's turn 3.18 exactly sums up her mainstream worldview and viewpoint on interpersonal, especially family, relations. Her flouting the Manner maxim sparks off the implicature that, even in the intimate environment of her family, she decides to behave, consequently to speak, elegantly and gracefully, namely as a conventional model woman. In addition, from the flouting of the Relevance maxim, the implicature arises that she believes in a conservative family hierarchy, with an authoritative father who has power over his passive wife and children. Yet, the linguistic scrutiny of the sequence at the Van de Kamps' has demonstrated that Rex, Danielle and Andrew do not share Bree's value system, but incline to more innovative principles and gender roles. Accordingly, as she attempts to impose her tenets on them, all that she manages to achieve is phrasing her distance from her family and her inability to communicate with them through her more and more impolite and uncooperative strategies.

### **3. Conclusion: Polite Interaction or Cooperative Interaction ... or Neither?**

Linguistic investigation of some of the conversations in the pilot of *Desperate Housewives* in which the character of Bree participates has enabled us to uncover her main personality traits and the linguistic tools through which they are manifested. In particular, the examination of some of her utterances and conversational strategies towards her family and neighbours through the pragmatic theoretical frameworks of Leech's Politeness principle and Grice's Cooperative principle has revealed her unbalanced personality. This has emerged forcefully from the unusual, even contradictory, way she mixes her concurrent exploitation of Leech's Politeness maxims and Grice's Cooperative maxims. In theory, there are four possible string types, as illustrated in the introduction. In practice, in each specific context, cleverly adapting her utterances in particular to the

addressee and to the specific goal of each speech event, she utilises or combines those types as follows:

Type-c strings (thereby being polite, but uncooperative) towards Rex, when he introduces the topic of their divorce;

Type-a strings + type-b strings (first both polite and cooperative, then neither polite nor cooperative) towards Paul and Zachary as she offers them her condolences at Mary Alice's wake;

Type-d strings + type-b strings (first impolite but cooperative, then both impolite and uncooperative) towards her family over dinner.

Contrary to expectations, one of Bree's objectives in all of the sequences, if not the main one, is not trying to cement her relations with her family and neighbours and to base them on solidarity and closeness, but attempting to arouse her addressees' admiration for her supposed ideal qualities and domestic skill. Therefore, the conversational means she uses not only produce a perlocutionary effect of distance from the other, i.e. the exact opposite of her aim, but also lay bare her traditional ideology and the mainstream female role model she struggles to incarnate — a woman who always appears elegant, well-groomed and smiling, who has refined and exquisite taste and skills, who behaves properly and respectably in all circumstances, who believes in patriarchal family values, who cooks excellent meals and cakes for her family and neighbours.

The consequent divergence between the intended and the actual perlocutionary effects of Bree's utterances reveals her social, psychological and emotional ineptitude. On the one hand, Bree communicates her obsessive compulsion to behave in this way, and on the other hand, her psychosis and her loss of contact with reality, two mental states attributable to the impossibility of fully personifying the allegedly perfect female role model, which a patriarchal system had imposed on her.

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# NEGOTIATING ETHNIC DESCRIPTIONS IN ENGLISH AS A *LINGUA FRANCA*

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**Abstract:** *The main aim of the paper is to show: first, how the descriptions of the ethnic other are realized in interactions in English as a lingua franca and next, how they influence the course of an interaction and the mutual relationship of interaction participants. Conversation analysis framework is used to observe social categorization process in data fragments illustrating the problem.*

**Keywords:** *English as a lingua franca, ethnic categorization, ethnomethodology, interaction, intercultural interaction, membership categorization analysis.*

## 1. Introduction

The main aim of my paper is first, to discuss how the descriptions of the ethnic other are realized in interactions in English as a *lingua franca*, especially in connection with prejudice and bias, and second, how specific modes of producing those ethnic categorizations, namely an ambiguous description reference, can be said to determine intercultural communication. Ethnomethodological conversation analysis framework is used to observe social categorization process and thus, the focus, itself phenomenological, is on how interaction participants themselves understand the meaning of ethnic descriptions as they are co-created in interactions.

The paper will discuss which of the ethnic descriptions are understood as positive and which as negative assessments, and hence treated as problematic by interaction participants; attention will be paid to how the latter are repaired or mitigated in intercultural communication, in order not to produce prejudice or a stereotype, but to create a description perceived as valid.

In the light of this analysis, I aim to argue that the category of the ethnic others that interaction participants belong to can determine communication to be evaluated as intercultural; this tends to be an especially ambiguous and touchy issue for several reasons. Interaction participants usually try to avoid being perceived as “doing prejudice” or producing

stereotypes, especially when there appears a problem of ambiguous reference. This happens because, no matter whether ethnic descriptions are positive or negative, the interaction participants present during the interaction may identify with some description as referring to themselves to varying degrees. Thus, it is a matter of meaning negotiation in interaction to realize how references to ethnic descriptions are to be understood and, thus, how problematic those categorizations turn out to be.

On top of that, interaction participants are aware that there might appear a *lingua franca* problem that could lead to ambiguous or varied cultural interpretations of categories, category attributes and category-bound activities, as social categories are “cultural inference rich” and may be interpreted as more or less positive or negative in different cultures.

## 2. Theory of social categorization

Conversation analysis views the social categorization as a process locally situated in interactions. Interaction participants display their understanding of the relevance and character of a given social category in a given communicative event. An important point made by ethnomethodologists is an issue of indexicality, namely even though there might exist a multitude of possible categorizations that might be logically correct for a given person or, as Coulter puts it, “correctly predicable,” (somebody can be a female, a driver, a student, Jewish, a hobo or Polish), only those categories and categorizations count as meaningful in a given interaction which get visibly co-selected by interaction participants (Coulter, 2001: 41).

Sacks introduced the term membership categorization device (MCD) for the practices of doing social description and defined it as consisting of “resources and practices of their deployment” or as composed of collections of categories and rules of application (Sacks, 1992: 40-48). Collections are not just random aggregates of categories; they constitute sets of categories that would fit together, such as, for instance, an age collection (a child/ a teenager/ an adult) or a gender collection (male/female) (Schegloff, 2007: 466). Each category has also category-bound activities, some of which are category-constitutive ones. The idea of ‘category bound’ activities means that some activities are normatively connected to certain categories of persons: e.g., “crying” is what “babies do” (Lee, 2001: 159).

Many a time, instead of explicitly referring to a category, it is enough to mention a person performing certain category-bound activity to make a given

category relevant in interpreting what is going on in the interaction (Schegloff, 2007: 470). This means that categories are topicalized, or they become a topic of a conversation and influence the interactional topic flow. This also means that their relevance in an interaction might be visible in a turn taking and repair system; for instance, in institutional interaction, a category-bound activity for an interviewee is to answer questions rather than ask them. So certain social categories are understood by interaction participants to have the right to control the topic flow to a greater extent than others, and thus to initiate new topics, change them or drop them more willingly than other categories.

In my paper, I deal with ethnic categorizations such as Polish, Spanish, Americans, etc., which, as Jayyusi observes, are organized as collectives of an open texture as opposed to the type collectives, such as Hell's Angels, Roman catholic church etc., which are of a more closed texture and self-organized groups for some purpose, similar to institutions. If somebody ascribes certain category-constitutive features rather than category-bound features to such ethnic collectivities by describing them, for instance, as: a "good German" or a "self-hating Jew", this might be perceived as "doing prejudice" or fanaticism (Jayyusi, 1984: 50-51). In case of type categorizations, in order to avoid "doing" prejudice or in order to make their descriptions comprehensible and valid, interaction participants usually provide warrants for descriptions, by arranging category-bound activities in certain logically progressing lists and by providing personal stories or accounts of activities. In general they tend to validate their descriptions by revealing ascriptive procedures, and showing on what basis they pass certain judgments (Jayyusi, 1984: 90-91).

As Jayyusi (1984: 25-26) observes, apart from the existence of culturally available category concepts such as *doctor*, *poet*, *murderer* or *saint*, there exist more specific, "type like" "umbrella categorizations" consisting of an adjective and a category such as: *a nice man*, *a nervous person*, *a pretty girl*, *an intelligent woman*, etc. I aim to show that such umbrella categorizations play a vital role in negotiating negative ethnic categorizations, since they can be used to specify generalizing ethnic descriptions into more defined and thus more credible ones that refer to certain types within an ethnic collectivity.

Studies show that interaction participants often use "meta-talk" or *frames* that come before questions and answers or after them in the beginning of turns. Such framing often works as a way of mitigating an utterance. Questions, for example, can be prefaced with "could you answer if" or "I

wonder if,” as described by Clayman and Heritage (2002: 749-775). They can also function as repair initiators (or are themselves repairs) to negotiate categorizations or, in other words, to repair troubles with categorization. An interesting problem, to be discussed on the basis of the data presented in this paper, is why speakers frame or mitigate categorization requests and follow-up categorizations. I would like to argue that such frames appear to negotiate categorizations that might be perceived as prejudice in ambiguous reference context of intercultural communication.

Since ethnomethodological interpretation of *biased and prejudiced categorizations* avoids any references to socio-psychological theories of prejudice, it is strongly based on the indexical and interactive context and it seems far from presenting an exhaustive list of features of such categorizations. Ethnic prejudice is understood to be done when:

- a. a negative/positive ethnic categorization appears and the description concerns the whole ethnic group;
- b. an ethnic categorization is understood as illogical or irrational in participants' understanding, since it is unwarranted by any logical argument, such as a logically progressing list of activities or accounts;
- c. it is performed by attributing negative/positive category-constitutive activities and attributes to an ethnic group rather than category-bound ones (Jayyusi, 1984: 50-51, 90-91).

So the biased or prejudiced category-constitutive feature for an ethnic category would, for instance, show in the use of expressions such as “a good German” (in Nazi Germany), a “self-hating Jew” (Jayyusi, 1984: 51). It should be observed, however, that whether a given activity is understood as a category-constitutive or a bound one can also be a matter of situated interpretation or visible negotiation of members in a given communicative event. Additionally, it seems that although attributing category-constitutive features seems to be Jayyusi's most vivid example of prejudice or bias, so can attributing category-bound activities to a given ethnic category be understood as potentially “doing prejudice.” I aim to argue that ethnic prejudice or bias is most clearly observable in the conditions of an ambiguous reference that makes communication intercultural, and that category-bound activities that describe an ethnic category can especially be understood as prejudice when no umbrella terms have been specified.



### 3. Data analysis

Data comprises excerpts from interviews conducted by advanced students of English as a foreign language with foreigners. The first one is conducted with an American interviewee and the second with a Spanish exchange student in Poland.

#### 3.1. Ethnic prejudice negotiation

##### Fragm\* . 1a (0:00:1:1) (TS, PG and A)

- 1 A: .hh there's a lot of Poles in there it's like (.) this <stereotype> about p- eh (.)  
 2 Polish people (.) that they're (..) it- it's not really (.) pleasant  
 3 T: ehmmm hhh=  
 4 A: =it's the negative  
 5 (1.5)  
 6 T: but actually the (.) sad phenomenon: (.) about the:: Poles who (...) eh::  
 7 emigrate to::: United States is that they tend to: eh (0.5) you know like mh::  
 8 burn the bridges (...) behind them  
 9 A: mhm  
 10 T: so (.) so that (..) they: they don't want to have anymore: connections  
 11 P: .hh yeah=  
 12 T: =with the Poles who::: who who you know who (..) who were left here=  
 13 P: =right because they feel m::uch m- cause they feel (.) better about  
 14 themselves actually=  
 15 A: =but  
 16 P: that the- they::: eh:: went to the US and now they're like you know:: (0.5) oh  
 17 yeah I live in the US and stuff ((using funny croaky voice)) .hh  
 18 A: yeah but actually when they go to in- eh::: US (.) they stay in these little  
 19 groups in these little communities of Poles and they're not really (.) getting out  
 20 of there .hhh thye're not really assi[milating]  
 21 T: [mhm]  
 22 A: with Americans (.) so (..) well- maybe a lit- some of them but .hhh uhm (..)   
 23 well the Poles that are coming to America they're kind of .hhh the the the ones  
 24 that (..) are unemployed and there's eh i- you know they seek w- (..) whatever  
 25 job  
 26 (..)

\* See the end of the paper for Transcription Symbols

In fragm.1a, before A's turn, T and P introduce the subject of the biggest Polish community in the US. In response, in lines 1-2, A says: “.hh there's a lot of Poles in there it's like (.) this <stereotype> about p- eh (.) Polish people (.) that they're (..) it- it it's not really (.) pleasant.” Her answer is mitigated and hesitations appear. Then, in line 5, A makes a pause and quits producing the description, allowing T and P to request a categorization or drop the subject as being too delicate. Instead, she uses a frame to explain why she decides to discontinue the subject when she says: “there's is a stereotype,” “it's not really pleasant”. A creates a *frame* with an adverbial emphasis “really” to avoid being perceived as producing a negative stereotype in general and one that could be interpreted as her personal “stereotypical” opinion.

Another reason for A to create a frame is her orientation to a *problem of ambiguous reference*. Usually, third party descriptions are realized in a more direct manner, with few explanations and warrants only, as it will be observed in the second interview. Since in this interview interviewers are Polish and the described category is Polish, they might choose to identify with the categorization. As a result, such ethnic categorizations are realized in a rather delicate manner and they are mitigated by frames, as if testing interviewers' identification with the description or checking to what degree the description can be problematic for them.

In response, T and P cooperatively produce an ethnic categorization themselves. They enumerate category-bound activities and attributes of the category in lines 6-8: T: “but actually the (.) sad phenomenon: (.) about the:: Poles who (...) eh:: emigrate to::: United States is that they tend to: eh (0.5) you know like mh:: burn the bridges (...) behind them”. In lines 12, 13, T and P co-produce a negative description of Poles as isolationists and as “feeling better” and snubbing Poles who remained in the country. Then, in lines 15-16, P produces a category-bound activity by construing a parodic and mocking voicing of Poles living in the US: “that the- they::: eh:: went to the US and now they're like you know::(0.5) oh yeah I live in the US and stuff ((using funny croaky voice)).”

This ethnic categorization is realized in a direct manner by both interviewers and interviewees and the reason for this is, as I would like to claim, that an *umbrella categorization* is used. The characterization does not concern all Poles but “us,” Poles living in Poland and “them,” “Poles who emigrated to the US”. In this way a clearer co-selection of categorization refer-

ence is achieved. Since T and G are excluded from the characterized type, descriptions can be more direct as they are aimed at a third absent party. A orients to the type categorization and also produces, in lines 17-19, quite a direct and negative category bound-activity to describe the Polish emigrant type: “yeah but actually when they go to in- eh:: US (.) they stay in these little groups in these little communities of Poles and they’re not really (.) getting out of there .hhh they’re not really assimilating.”

She says that “they” are not assimilating with Americans and she realizes it as an argumentative characterization introduced by the conjunctive “but,” so the immigrant type is characterized as somebody who either assimilates and abandons or keeps contact with his or her country or as somebody who does not assimilate and keeps or abandons contact with the native land and culture. The issue remains unresolved and A adds the category-bound activities of “the Poles that are coming to America” as a group of a low status, unemployed ones, “who will take any job”. So in a way she probably understands T and P’s categorization of Polish immigrants as ascribing a higher status to them, and she chooses to contest it in lines 21-23: “with Americans (.) so (..) ma- maybe a lit- some of them but .hhh uhm (..) well the Poles that are coming to America they’re kind of .hhh the the the ones that )..= are unemployed and there’s eh i- you know they seek w- (..) whatever job”.

An umbrella categorization of an ethnic type is realized cooperatively, the category reference “they,” the Poles who emigrated, is co-selected. All participants commonly realize the negative categorization; however, an argumentative issue of the reasons and the details of the category-bound activities introduced by A remain undiscussed. The topic is dropped. As a result, the categorization, even though quite specific in the sense of using umbrella terms, still remains quite general.

**Fragm. 1b** (0:00:1:5) (TS, PG and A)

- 28 T: mhm=  
 29 A: =they can:: get and- (..) .hhhh they're just  
 30 P: what about these [stereotypes]  
 31 A: [xxxxxxx]  
 32 P cause you started the topic and (.) kind of (.) went around it cause oah:: well  
 33 yh::: you know .hhhh actually >there there's no problem< for us to hear  
 34 something un- unpleasant about eh: our eh:: la- landsmen actually=

- 35 T: = so maybe y- tell us what annoys you (.) in in us hhhhh  
 36 A: eh:::: [well]  
 37 P: [maybe] what annoys the Americans::  
 38 A: =th- the Americans↑ the Americans th- the view:::: of:: eh the American  
 39 view:: of a Po::le:: ((funny voice)) (...) well actually ih- (..) Polish people are  
 40 very hard working .hhhh they work a lot (..) for shitty money (..) actually th-  
 41 they do (.) whatever they ca::n:: (..) they (.) work nightshifts and .hhh they  
 42 work like twenty hours a day .hhh so:: uh: but they do (.) their work uh yhm  
 43 precisely and they do it yh (.) good  
 44 (...)  
 45 A: but actually there're there're uhm (1.5) they have this ability and capability  
 46 (.) to(hh) drink(hhh) a lot(hhhh) then  
 47 [hhhhhhh]  
 48 T: [hhhhhhh]  
 49 A: stay sober (.) Americans you know they (.) drink their (.) Budwei::sers::  
 50 jus::t jus::t (but like) they- you know shitty shitty [shitty beer]  
 51 T: [which is a rather light] beer hhhhhh=  
 52 A: =ye::::s [ye::s] ye::s  
 53 T: [hhhhhhhhh]

In fragm. 1b, in lines 30, 32-34, 35 and 37, T and P produce requests for A to categorize Poles in a general, negative way. A considers this problematic, as the prejudice or bias can appear: “cause you started the topic and (.) kind of (.) went around it cause oah:: well yh::: you know .hhhh actually >there there’s no problem< for us to hear something un- unpleasant about eh: our eh:: la- landsmen actually”. In lines 32-34, P re-introduces the request for the categorization of Poles. He refers to the general ethnic category that they started discussing in the beginning of the interview. In the first frame, when he says: “cause you started the topic and kind of went around it,” he explains why he reintroduces the dropped subject, indicating a trouble with A’s first answer that appeared earlier. He *frames the request* as a characterization of landsmen, “they”, so, not necessarily themselves, the participants in the interaction. He uses the frame that “it is no problem to hear unpleasant things about our landsmen,” to make it easier for A to produce a negative categorization, and at the same time he implies that the interviewers will be somehow excluded from the description. However, the

category “our landsman” is still a general, open texture ethnic category, and it is difficult to be described without prejudice.

Moreover, T, in line 35, reformulates this request to ask for a negative categorization of “us”, which is more problematic for the interviewee, as, first, it is a request for criticism, and, second, the categorization will refer to the present party: “so maybe y- tell us what annoys you (.) in in us hhhhh”. Additionally, P, in line 37, makes it even more difficult for the interviewee, as he asks A to produce an even more *generalizing ethnic categorization* in a relational pair, “Americans vs. Poles”. Here, the status of A’s answer would become quite equivocal, as it might be interpreted as her personal prejudice, for instance, or as a generalizing prejudice Americans might hold. In fact, T and P cooperate in characterizing A as a *representative of an ethnic category*, that of Americans. This becomes even more manifest when P asks in line 37: “what annoys the Americans:::.”

She delays answering the request and precedes it with “well.” She mitigates her assessment a lot, produces hesitation tokens in line 38, “eh::,” “well” and finally resorts to *parodic framing* of her following description, by producing the following frame in an exaggerated intonation, in lines 38-39: “th- the Americans the Americans th- the view::: of:: eh the American view:: of a Po::le::: ((funny voice)).” The whole frame functions as a mitigation of the following description since A’s answer might be treated as possibly problematic in the situational context. Namely, her interviewers expect her to produce a negative description, which she tries to avoid, and in the context of their expectations, her positive evaluation can be considered a dispreferred action that might be sanctioned. The point is, A treats the request for a negative and generalizing ethnic description as problematic and avoids answering it by using a frame that introduces and describes the character of a following talk. In fact, it is also an argumentative action, showing the problem with answering a question that asks for stereotyping. Additionally, A is unsure of the cultural value of her description, whether it will be perceived as positive or negative.

She aims to frame her characterization as not a very serious one, and herself only a mock and pretend animator of such an assessment. She actually indirectly rejects interviewers’ request for a negative categorization, and she produces a parodic voicing of somebody’s introduction to “the American view of the Pole.” The frame is followed by A’s series of positive category-bound activities of a type of Poles in the US in lines 40-44.

Later in her utterance, in lines 44-49 she introduces a more ambiguous category-bound activity of Poles drinking a lot: “but actually there’re there’re uhm (1.5) they have this ability and capability (.) to(hh) drink(hhh) a lot(hhhh) then [hhhhhh]stay sober.” Again A produces this description with great hesitation, there are repetitions and pauses, she inserts laughter particles in her utterance, as if orienting to the fact that her categorization might be perceived as a negative stereotype. It is also intended to be treated as a jocular, amusing description, not a serious characterization. She says Polish men can drink a lot and stay sober; she implies here, through the characterization that is quite ambiguous, that Polish men are strong, drinking probably strong alcohol, as opposed to American weaklings drinking “weak,” “shitty beer”. So she produces the categorization based on contrastive features of two gender and ethnic categories.

However, the possibility of the cultural difference in perceiving certain category attributes and category-bound activities exists, as A is quite cautious in producing the characterization. When T overlaps her description with cooperative laughter, then A finishes by characterizing American men in a jocular-negative way as drinking “shitty beer”. However, the categorization is perceived by Polish interviewers as a definitely positive description of Polish men. T orientates himself to such interpretation by confirming it in lines 47, 50, 52, and by laughing and later on by discussing types of beer, and what their favorite ones are. Actually, a jocular, stereotypical ethnic- gender categorization (a sort of a positive bias) is produced; however, it is *parodied* and *framed as a stereotype*, so as not to be treated as a seriously generalizing categorization.

### 3.2 Ethnic bias negotiation

The second interview was conducted by Polish students of English with a Spanish student on Erasmus exchange in Poland. In the beginning of the interview, he describes his family: he has a Spanish father and a Czech mother. This interview has been chosen to show how positive categorizations are co-created and what can be considered as a positive ethnic categorization, as well as to show how negative ethnic categorizations are realized when a described party is absent and when a speaker has the ambiguous status of potentially being within the described category. The ethnic category “Czech” is part of a family category, including D’s mother and grand-

parents. However, since D rather distances himself from this ethnic category, it might be treated as a third, absent party description.

**Fragm. 2 (0:00:41:8) (N, A and D)**

- 1 A: have you been to to Czech Republic  
 2 (.)  
 3 A: to [to Brno]  
 4 D: [I was] I was in in Prague (..) two times=  
 5 A: =in Prague  
 6 N: so were [in Brno]  
 7 D: [I: p-] I prefer eh: (.) in Brno↑  
 8 N: hehehe  
 9 D: in Brno in my [gra- gran]dfather's  
 10 N: [hhhhh]  
 11 D: eh::: (.) and (.) I was::: two times in Cracovia (..) and [I prefer]  
 12 N: [xxxx]  
 13 D: I prefer Poland  
 14 A: OK  
 15 N: hehehh[ehhhhhe]  
 16 A: [don't you] xxxxxxxx  
 17 D: yes (.) because yh you know eh::: (..) Czech Republic (2.0) you know  
 18 Czechs are:: s:- s::: small and ver- very very::: m::: eh::: (1.0) you know the-  
 19 they they:: think only about working and they think eh (.) only about beer  
 20 and::: (..) m (.) that's that's all (.) and here in Poland w- we uh::: I I feel the  
 21 same as I like in (.) Espania  
 22 (.)  
 23 N: yes people are:: so vivid yes↑ full of li::fe (.) energ[etic]  
 24 D: [yes]

In fragm. 2, lines 17-20, D creates category-bound activities to describe the ethnic category of Czechs. The description is negative, since Czechs are presented as “no fun” ethnic category, as “small” and probably with a narrow orientation on work and beer. He uses the token “you know,” appealing to the common knowledge of interaction participants and this is the only mitigation he uses. This happens because there is no ambiguous reference, the description he uses does not concern the present party and is addition-

ally contrasted with the positive categorization of Poles, who by implication must be “fun loving” and not so much work oriented, Poland being more like Spain, in line 13: “I prefer Poland,” and in lines 19 — 20: “and here in Poland w- we uh::: I I feel the same as I like in (.) Espania”. D characterizes Poles by describing the country, although in quite general terms, since D probably supposes that O, being Polish, knows what Poles are like. N extends his characterization by saying in line 22: “yes people are:: so vivid yes full of li::fe (.) energetic”. Doing this, she actually indirectly ascribes positive attributes to the ethnic category of Spaniards and D agrees with her description.

Generally, D refrains from characterizing himself as a stranger or as an ethnic other. His positive ethnic categorizations are realized in a direct way as a positive stereotype or bias. And as it happens in this and in other observed interactions, interaction participants do not always produce warrants for positive assessments, as they suppose that the present party agrees with their descriptions. If explanations appear, they are usually reduced in content and usually function as reformulated enhancement of positive categorizations.

**Fragm. 3** (0:00:41.2) (N, A and D)

- |    |  |
|----|--|
| 1  | D: and I know::: eh::: where I will be l- looking and searching for my wife  |
| 2  | (.)  |
| 3  | N: [where]   |
| 4  | D: [here in] Poland hhhh xxx   |
| 5  | N: but why::   |
| 6  | D: hohhohohhoo   |
| 7  | N: yhhhhh  |
| 8  | D: hhhhhh  |
| 9  | N: in Po]land  |
| 10 | D: hh s- si si   |
| 11 | N: why(hhh) you could (.) could you tell us                                  |
| 12 | (.)  |
| 13 | D: because(hhh) yh:: y::ou know:: (.) Po- Po- Poland maybe (.) i: is in:: yh |
| 14 | Eastern part of Europe but (..) your   |
| 15 | N: [hhhhhhhhh]   |
| 16 | D: [eh:::] your  |



- 17           (.)
- 18           A: charm=
- 19           D: =your attitude to to (.) to life (.) your lifestyle and yo- your eh:: way of
- 20           thinking and (..) .hhhh yh::: behavior is::: (.) so Spanish in in:: in::
- 21           N: hhhhhh hahha[hahahuhu]
- 22           D:           [the background] so it's:: (.) is so common common for me (..) and
- 23           (..)
- 24           N: hyhm [yes↑]
- 25           D:   [yes] (..) so (..) beautiful girls that's why=
- 26           N: =ehyhyhyh (..) thank you our (.) camera woman also right↑
- 27           D: uh gracias xxxxx
- 28           A: heh

In fragm. 3, lines 1 and 4, D emphasizes his positive image of a Polish category by stating that he would like to have a Polish wife. In reaction to this N expresses amazement and asks him for an explanation, in lines 5, 11 and 9.. In return, D produces another positive categorization of Poles in lines 19-20, 22: “=your attitude to to (.) to life (.) your lifestyle and yo- your eh:: way of thinking and (..) .hhhh yh::: behavior is::: (.) so Spanish in in:: in::: the background so it's:: (.) is so common common for me.” The positive categorization is realized directly, D describes the mentality and behavior patterns, emphasizing the commonality, if not outright identity between the ethnic category of Poles and that of Spaniards. Still, D's categorization is devoid of extended explanations, as he probably assumes that hence the described categories are identical, interviewers understand them, and second, since they are positive, they do not require any explanations that usually mitigate critical assessments.

Positive ethnic descriptions are treated as compliments, so the ambiguous reference problem gets resolved in the interaction, participants hearing D's positive descriptions as describing them. Ethnic type categorizations, like the general type “Polish beautiful women”, do not appear to be as specific as in the first interview, since ethnic categorizations are understood by interaction participants as unproblematic for any present party.

#### 4. Conclusion

In intercultural talk there is a great degree of reference ambiguity and the possibility for prejudice and stereotype to appear. This becomes especially apparent in the first interview. The interviewee A displays problems with producing ethnic categorizations, since they are usually negative and open texture, so a stereotype or a prejudice can appear, and prejudiced categorizations seem to be problematic in this interaction because there is an ambiguity of reference problem. To resolve reference ambiguity and not to do prejudice and still be able to discuss cultural experiences:

- a. interaction participants use *category frames* of talk, distancing themselves to ensuing categorizations. They use the following kinds of frames: framing a categorization as a mere generalization or a stereotype and using parodic voicing;
- b. they use *umbrella categorizations* to discuss ethnic types, instead of ethnic categories in general. So if there is a discussion about ethnic categories, it usually concerns contesting interpretations of *type ethnic categories*.

In the case of ethnic categorizations that might potentially refer to the present party, it is interactionally important for speakers to resolve the problem concerning the degree to which interaction participants identify with descriptions as possible representatives of a category.

In the second interview, positive descriptions of an ethnic category are realized as a positive stereotype or bias. They are frequently unwarranted, as usually no problems for communication partners are anticipated to be connected with construing such categorizations. The interviewees potentially belonging to the positively described category ratify, confirm it, and often treat descriptions as compliments referring to themselves. So ambiguity of reference is resolved in favour of positive ethnic categorizations. The possible warrant or explanation of a positive ethnic categorization claims the similarity of two ethnic categories and implies the speaker's identification with a given ethnic category. Negative third and absent party ethnic categorizations and positive present party ones are performed more directly and they get less mitigated, as there is usually no ambiguity of reference problem. In case of negative third party descriptions, only few, quite limited explanations for category-bound activities and attributes are offered. Such third party descriptions can be paired with the present party positive descriptions to enhance a positive categorization.

Most of the types of ethnic categorizations can appear as well in various types of interactions, both in a native or a foreign language or in a *lingua franca*. However, within an ethnomethodological CA framework, what seems to make an interaction intercultural is the interaction participants' orientation to it as to an intercultural event, that is one in which various aspects of different ethnic cultures interplay with one another and possible differences in communicative competences can play a role in understanding what is going on in the interaction and in acting accordingly. So far there seem to exist several intercultural exchange determinants which can, but do not have to appear together. The first is the interaction participants' orientation to the fact that communication happens in a *lingua franca* (an aspect that remains undiscussed here), then their orientation to the topic of cultural differences, and finally, the main, and, I believe, the most remarkable determinant, an orientation to the problem of ambiguous ethnic category reference.

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**\* Transcription symbols:**

(.) micropause

(1.0) pause in seconds

[ the beginning of an overlap

] the end of an overlap

: prolonged sound

h outbreath or laughter

.hhh inbreath

a emphasis

CAPITALS utterance louder than the surrounding talk

(xxxx) unintelligible talk

°silent° utterance

↑raising intonation

↓falling intonation

>quicker< utterance and <slower> utterance

- interrupted or discontinued utterance or a sharp cut-off of the prior sound

= latching between utterances.

# THE META-MODEL: THE NLP MAP OF LANGUAGE

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**Abstract:** *NLP has a very useful map of how language operates, namely the Meta-Model. It aims at identifying those linguistic patterns which are likely to generate vagueness and at recreating them by using questions to clarify meaning. Neuro-Linguistic Programming names these questions meta-model questions, as they shed some light on the meta meaning of words. The Meta-Model is needed when applying NLP to business English as a means of improving language patterns in communication.*

**Keywords:** *artfully vague language, business communication, Meta-Model, NLP.*

## 1. Introduction: The Meta-Model — The NLP Map of Language

From the very beginning, the Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) was closely linked with language models. Every language model is used to analyze people's filtering processes and to recover information that has been left out during the filtering processes. NLP was initiated by the linguistic modelers Bandler and Grinder in the early 1970s. As Dilts and DeLozier (2000: 733) point out, they developed the Meta-Model as "a means of identifying and responding to problematic patterns in the speech of people". In dealing with the Meta-Model, three essential aspects need to be highlighted: 1) the Meta-Model consists of a series of categories identifying ambiguities of verbal communication which may bring about limitations, confusions or miscommunication; 2) the Meta-Model offers a set of questions for each category with the purpose of clarifying verbal ambiguities and of challenging or transforming potential limitations; 3) the function of the Meta-Model is to identify and recover problematic generalizations, deletions and distortions by analyzing the surface structure and providing an inquiry system in order to get at a better representation of the deep structure. The three basic troublesome areas (deletion, generalization and distortion) were very useful for the *maps of language* applied by Bandler and Grinder (1975) to identify common pat-

terns. The basic principle of the Meta-Model and one of the fundamental principles of NLP is Korzybski's (1933) notion that "*the map is not the territory*". His work in semantics, combined with Chomsky's syntactic theory of transformational grammar, represent the linguistic essentials of NLP. According to Korzybski's *law of individuality*, no two persons, situations, or processes are alike in detail. In his opinion, "[...] we have far fewer words and concepts than unique experiences, and this tends to lead to the identification or *confusion* of two or more situations (what is known as generalization in the Meta-Model)" (Dilts and DeLozier, 2000: 577).

In communication, information is processed as it is heard, seen, or *filtered*. A message may be shortened (because of objective or subjective causes) by *deleting* parts of it (for example, vocabulary that is not normally used, or things that are not considered to be interesting or useful). The meaning of the message may become *distorted* by our internal processing before being stored. The hearer may get only a *generalized* impression of what was said to him. To put it differently, what we hear may be *generalized* and changed according to context or put together from different sources. As a matter of fact, as McLaren (2000: 113) puts it, "[...] information is *deleted* (not stored or not reported), *generalised* (experiences are added together to form a composite) and *distorted* (usually by drawing false conclusions from evidence). The whole process is called *filtering*" (emphasis in the original).

The set of questions making up the *Meta-Model* are used to deliberately fill in the deleted material and to correct the distortions and generalizations.

A parallel system of deliberately introducing deletions, generalizations and distortions was used in hypnotherapy by Dr. Milton Erickson, the model being called the Milton Model (cf. Molden 1996, see sections 1.2., 2.). A decade later, in the 1980s, a new language model was devised by John McWhirter, called the *Basic Fractal Language Model* (McLaren, 2000: 122).

## 2. The Basic Fractal Language Model

Derivation of Model			
Filter	Remedy	Process	Question
Deletion	Insert Detail	Adding	What?
Generalisation	Elicit boundaries & Scope	Extending	How?
Distortion	Establish Connections	Innovating	Why?

Fractal Language Model Patterns					
Main	Sub-Levels		Pattern Type	Statement	
Detail	Detail	Static	Components	I am worried.	
		Dynamic	Comparatives	You are better.	
	Scope	Static	Component References	Things are getting done late.	
		Dynamic	Process-References	His work is better.	
Scope	Connections	Static	Lesser Nominalisations	She is busy.	
		Dynamic	Nominalisations	We are in talks.	
	Detail	Static	Quantifiers	It's too much.	
		Dynamic	Qualifiers	This is boring.	
	Scope	Static	Static	Scoping	People don't like you.
			Dynamic	Dynamic Scoping	Their troubles are increasing.
	Connections	Static	Modal Operator of Structure	We can't do it.	
			Modal Operator of Sequence	I need a pay rise.	
Connections	Detail	Static	Judgements/Mind-reading	His wife doesn't like him.	
		Dynamic	Injunctions/Lost Performative	Don't walk on the grass.	
	Scope	Static	Complex Equivalence	Her grin means she has won.	
		Dynamic	Concurrence/Equation	He fell over and took the day off.	
	Connections	Static	Inference	You smiled: you hate me.	
			Dynamic	Cause-Effect	I lost the sale and I was sacked.

(McLaren, 2000:120)

The BFLM refers to the whole filtering process that includes deletion, generalisation and distortion. *Deletion* brings about loss of detail. In order to keep up with the flow of communication, we ask for *details* to get the necessary information. For example, for the statement *We are interested*, the question asked in order to get details is *What are you interested in?*

*Generalization* represents the scope of information, and consists in losing boundaries. In order to realise the *scope* of the information and to re-establish the boundaries, for a statement such as *The goods haven't been delivered yet*, the question in the Meta-Model is *Which goods haven't been delivered yet?* *Distortion* consists in making inappropriate *connections*. Either stated things can be connected, or unstated things can be included. For example, the question to be asked for the statement *He seems to be bored* is *Why do you say that?* Or, for the statement *The secretary didn't know where the two files were and I was very upset*, the question is *Is there any connection between these situations?*

As far as the main levels of the BFLM are concerned, the basic level of the model is the *detail* which is related to *deletion*, the main idea being that deletion brings about the loss of detail. Thus, the *remedy of deletion* is, according to the model, the *process of adding/ inserting details*, the question to be asked being marked by '*what?*'. The distinction *Detail* also corresponds to *being specific* and to *getting more details about an example*.

The second level of the BFLM is *scope*. It is the *remedy of generalisation* by the *process of extending*, the question to be asked being marked by '*how?*'. The distinction *Scope* also corresponds to *limiting the scope of the detail* and *quantifying* it, on the one hand, and to *questioning how the ideas fit together* and *asking for thought patterns*, on the other. The third level of the BFLM is represented by *connections* being related to *distortion*. *Connections* are the *remedy of distortion* by the *process of innovating*, the question to be asked being marked by '*why?*'

### **2.1. The language patterns of deletion, generalization and distortion**

The language patterns, called Fractal Language Model Patterns, are derived from the Basic Fractal Language Model discussed above. *Detail*, *scope* and *connections* represent the main levels of the Fractal Language Model Patterns, corresponding to deletion, generalisation and distortion, respectively. Each main level includes *detail*, *scope* and *connections* as its



sublevels (see the table above). Each of the sublevels may be static and dynamic. We consider it as interesting as well as useful to study the types of patterns from a linguistic point of view.

For example, the *static* sublevels of *Detail* are realised by component references and nominalisations, whereas the *dynamic* sublevels are rendered by comparatives, process references and nominalisations. It is obvious that nominalisations are shared by both the static and dynamic sublevels.

Secondly, the *static* sublevels of *Scope* are rendered by quantifiers and modal operators of structure, whereas the *dynamic* sublevels are rendered by qualifiers and modal operators of sequence. Thirdly, the *static* sublevels of *Connections* are realised by pragmatic patterns of judgement / mind-reading, complex equivalence and inference. The patterns used to represent the *dynamic* sublevels are: injunctions / lost performative, concurrence / equation and cause-effect.

The language patterns characteristic of the *Meta-Model* cover these three problematic areas, i.e. from *deletion*, through *generalisation*, to *distortion*. In addition, the range of possibilities includes static and dynamic aspects in close relationship with the language patterns, which also differ from a sublevel to another.

The Meta-Model includes a series of categories representing common problem areas in verbal communication. Thus, there are three important areas with the following specific patterns: 1) *information gathering* with the linguistic patterns related to the recovery of missing links and key details; 2) *setting and identifying limits* with patterns of words related to placing (or assuming) boundaries and limitations on people's behaviour and actions; 3) *semantic ill-formedness* with patterns of judgement processes used to give meaning to behaviour and events.

According to Bandler and Grinder (1975), *deletion* is a process by which we selectively pay attention to certain dimensions of our experience and exclude others. *Linguistic deletion* is one of the key patterns that can be solved by the Meta-Model. As Dilts and DeLozier (2000: 276) put it, "It relates to the fact that, in verbal statements, a person, object or relationship, that can enrich or even change the meaning of the statement, is left out or deleted from the verbal surface structure". By using the Meta-Model to locate deletions in the surface structure, areas that have not been adequately defined can be identified.

*Generalization* is, in Bandler and Grinder's (1975) words, "[...] the process by which elements or pieces of a person's model of the world become detached from their original experience and come to represent the entire category of which the experience is an example. Our ability to generalize is essential to coping with the world..." (qtd. in Dilts and DeLozier, 2000: 436).

Linguistically speaking, this process is context specific. For example, a question such as "Have you eaten today?" is a greeting formula in the Chinese culture, but not in another culture, where such a question carries a different meaning. In case a generalization sounds unusual, or even strange, it is very important to check the original context. In other words, generalization needs to be evaluated in its proper context.

From the NLP perspective, *distortion* is the process which allows us to make shifts of our experience of sensory data (cf. Bandler and Grinder, 1975). It is the ability to create or transform information and alter data to fit our preconceptions or our perceptions. From a linguistic point of view, distortion occurs when a deep structure is transformed into a surface structure. Therefore, it is obvious that the *Meta-Model* "uses language to clarify language, it prevents you from deluding yourself that you understand what words mean; it reconnects language with experience" (O'Connor and Seymour, 2002: 90).

According to Katan (2004: 125-126), the study of language went through a revolution when Noam Chomsky (1965) presented his model. In Katan's view, "For a map or model to be useful, it must generalize, distort and delete what is real". Chomsky's formalist model, on which the Meta-Model was based, suggests that for every surface structure there is a more complex deep structure. Chomsky suggests that native speakers know if the surface structure is well-formed grammatically. The Meta-Model uses the principle of 'well-formedness' to investigate meaning.

The Meta-Model aims at identifying those linguistic patterns which are likely to generate vagueness or what is usually referred to as *artfully vague language*, and at recreating them by using questions to clarify meaning. In *Neuro-Linguistic Programming* these questions are called *meta-model questions*, as they shed some light on the meta meaning of words. The patterns of 'artfully vague' language reinforce the individual's power to use language arousing their curiosity to be acquainted with each other's experience.

*Artfully vague language* was labelled the 'Milton Model' by Grinder, Bandler and DeLozier. Milton used vague language to help people change the way they think. He labelled the language patterns *artfully vague language* which he used to help people "change the way they represent their experiences internally, rather than give direct advice on what to do" (Molden and Hutchinson, 2006: 74). This is because our personal perception of events is the *map of our reality* and no two persons' maps are alike. In NLP it is known under this name "after late Milton Erickson who was recognized around the world for his success and uniqueness as a hypnotherapist" (Molden, 1996: 152).

Linguistically, long chunks of information may be vague and an understanding of how people think, feel and behave is required. One of the best ways to get an accurate perception of events is the careful listening to people's words and the use of the Meta-Model questions. "Think of the meta-model as an antidote to limiting vague language. It seeks out clarity by getting to the specifics of an experience. It does this by questioning the generalizations, deletions and distortions", as Molden and Hutchinson (2006: 78) put it.

### **3. The Meta-Model in Business Communication (BC) and the Milton Model**

The *Milton Model* (i.e. artfully vague language) is "a powerful language. It is powerful because it uses words that have no specific meaning yet which anyone can believe. It makes use of gross generalizations, deletions, and distortions to remove all specific content from the message" (Molden, 1996: 152). The message being thus emptied of precision elements needs to clarify the meaning of words and recover the information generalised, distorted and deleted by our internal representation systems. The way to make up for that was considered to be the purpose of the Meta-Model. Its relevance is pointed out by Molden (1996) who considers it "the precision tool", and "the antidote to limiting artfully vague language", acknowledging that it is used "to pin people down to specifics, such as in a problem-solving group where measurement is being defined" (ibidem).

The *Meta-Model* is likely to raise awareness of the meta-meaning of words and seek out clarity by means of Meta-Model questions, i.e. by questioning the generalisations, deletions and distortions. The Meta-Model also

helps to make explicit the way people want to change and, therefore, how to help them in changing the way they think, or, according to Molden and Hutchinson (2006: 78) *to respond to the way “the individual is empowered to make whatever changes will help to get better-quality results”* (my emphasis).

Considering all this, we have thought of calling the *Meta-Model* a *stickler for detail and accuracy*. We have thought that such a label for the Meta-Model including a hendyadis is much more suggestive for the clarity and precision it brings about in the language (patterns) used. The language people use is very much influenced by their beliefs and associated values. The Meta-Model questions used in NLP help to reveal the meta-meaning (a higher level of meaning) of words. It is a fact that negative vague language becomes part of our everyday language, on the one hand, and positive artfully vague language patterns offer alternative choices for the changes leading to better results, on the other.

### 3.1. The NLP Meta-Model in BC and the use of tenses

An essential aspect of making changes and choices by means of language is the use of tenses. Thus, the use of the past, present, present perfect and future tenses in Business Communication (BC) is of utmost importance. That is to say, by changing the tense, the intensity of the limiting belief can be modified. For example, the present tense used for negative experiences may limit our potential. By way of illustration, a statement such as

*e.g. I don't seem able to agree to the company's policy*  
should be changed to

*I have often defied the authority of the senior managers.*

The *tense* can also be put in relation to *deixis* by changing, for example, the deictic demonstratives showing non-proximity into deictic demonstratives showing proximity. This suggests association rather than dissociation, implying desire for a change. It also programs us to focus on a possible improvement, leading us from a limiting (negative) belief to a helpful (positive) one. For example, a statement such as

*e.g. If I accomplished that I would certainly be promoted sooner.*  
should be reformulated as

*I have never accomplished this, but I am eager to try it.*

The change of the deixis *that* → *this* besides the change of the tenses and moods, i.e. present subjunctive → present perfect indicative and pres-

ent conditional → present tense indicative, as well as the change of a conditional sentence type II into two main clauses in a coordination relationship suggest association implying desire to change something, i.e. the way one thinks and behaves.

Similarly, a statement like

e.g. *We will never be able to implement that strategy*

is better expressed in the form

*So far we have not been able to implement this strategy* (implying that it has not happened till now but it may be possible in the future).

The last statement suggests that there is a *possibility* that things can change. Moreover, a desire to change can be associated with a future intention:

e.g. *In the past we did not take such steps to increase sales but we are going to make efforts and advertise more.*

### **3.2. The function of the Meta-Model in BC**

As pointed out, the Meta-Model is considered (Katan, 2004) *the solution to understanding and explaining imprecise language and clarifying vagueness emerging from the use of language patterns that make use of generalizations, distortions and deletions*. As Katan points out, “*The function of the Meta-Model is to bring to the surface what is hidden. We should anticipate the fact, however, that the Meta-Model itself, in clarifying complete representations, can only point towards what is actually happening between speaker and hearer*” (Katan, 2004: 127, my emphasis).

The Meta-Model is needed when applying NLP to business communication as a means of improving language patterns, of reducing the distance between the surface structure and sensory representation, and the deeper structure, as in the processes of encoding (when the sender of the message encodes the sensory-based experience into words) and decoding (when the receiver transforms the auditory signals into their own sensory representation), information is often deleted or distorted. It is the Meta-Model that brings to someone’s awareness the meta-meaning of words and the linguistic patterns that are troublesome in communication.

According to Dilts (1983), the Meta-Model provides “an identification of linguistic patterns which could become problematic in the course of communication and a series of responses through which two individuals may ensure more complete communication” (Dilts qtd. in Jacobson, 1983: 142).

## 4. Conclusion

In the communication of any type, special attention must be paid to the linguistic patterns used, to the context in which they occur, as well as to the adequate responses. In this respect, the Meta-Model is used not to find the *right* answers, but, as Dilts and DeLozier (2000: 739) state, “[...] rather to ask better questions — to widen our map of the world rather than to find the ‘right map of the world’. The purpose of the Meta-Model inquiry system is to help identify missing links and reference experiences that make up the ‘deeper structure’ of our conscious models of the world”. Furthermore, the Meta-Model questioning system is open-ended, since it offers further insights into the problem.

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# THE INTERPRETATION OF THE NOUN PHRASE IN DISCOURSE: INTENTION AND RECOGNITION

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***Abstract:** The paper focuses on the discourse functions of the noun phrase from a specific perspective by looking at how the noun phrase participates in the cognitive and interpersonal processes developing the discourse. It explores how the NP becomes relevant in the discourse through categorization, certain rhetorical patterns, evaluation and metaphORIZATION.*

***Keywords:** cognitive linguistic approach, discourse functions, mental processes, noun phrase.*

## 1. Introduction

To investigate the function of the noun phrase in discourse the linguist has to take a broader perspective of meaning, and look first of all at such general cognitive processes as conceptualization, the storage and retrieval of meaning, as well as reasoning. The topic naturally requires not only the examination of lexical and conceptual issues or an exploration of the textual functions of the noun phrase, but also reference to its contribution to the interpersonal aspects of the context in which it is used.

The nature of such an investigation is interdisciplinary, therefore I will take a combinatory approach, which I consider crucial in the study of language in context. I adopt a cognitive linguistic base to an investigation of the textual functions of the NP motivated by the following questions: How does reference assignment — i.e. concept interpretation — arise in the Interpreter’s (Hearer’s) mind, i.e. how does the relevance of an NP emerge in discourse, and how can it be interpreted by the ‘other mind’?

## 2. Meaning in discourse; concepts and procedures

It is a fact that not everything involved in the meaning is linguistically encoded, and yet, there is relatively little misunderstanding between the

participants of a discourse. Langacker (1987: 97-8) argues for meaning to be a conceptual phenomenon, which must be described with reference to cognitive processing. Wilson and Sperber (1993) similarly emphasize that in a theory of meaning it is essential to make a distinction between *conceptual meaning* and *procedural meaning*.

For utterance interpretation it is essential to take both types of meaning into consideration. Sperber & Wilson's Relevance Theory (1986, 1995) provides an adequate explanation of discourse interpretation. They set out from the observation that in the communication process the attention of humans is directed towards whatever seems relevant either because it is ostensive or because it can be inferred from the context. Such stimuli serve as an impulse for the hearer (or reader) to construe and then evaluate her assumptions about the meaning of the proposition and the speaker's communicative intention, including the implicit content and the speaker's attitude.

Thus — in contrast with the code model Sperber & Wilson (1986, 1995) emphasize — interpretation has to be considered an inferential process rather than decoding. It is a series of *inferences*, that form the mechanism of reasoning involving *sense selection* from the system of language and from personal experiences. Meaning is contextual. For the description of context, Sperber and Wilson (ibid.) also use the term *cognitive environment* and *context selection*. In their cognitive theoretical approach, the context is not given — as it is in many other approaches —, but it is chosen step by step during the interpretation process.

Context selection is stimulated by different types of knowledge: lexical knowledge, encyclopaedic knowledge, knowledge of reality, as well as skills in logical reasoning. The last type is usually understood as either of the two modes of inference — *deduction and induction* — which are basically ascribed to logical thinking by logicians and philosophers of science. Givón (2005: 11, 21) points out that Aristotle recognized a third mode, called *apagoge*, which then Peirce translates as '*abduction*' or '*reduction*'. "This is the mode of inference used in reasoning about relevance and importance, similarity and analogy, hypothesis and explanation" (Givón, 2005: 11).

Abductive reasoning means that the interpreter, 'the other mind', uses her/his intuitions to be able to interpret even the fuzzy circumstances or the seemingly chaotic facts as coherent. As meanings in discourse typically emerge from rather intricate conditions, it seems entirely plausible to



assume that, in the extremely complex process of interpretation, abduction is a predominant mode of inference. Reference to abduction presupposes a flexible treatment of the context, according to which the context is a mental rather than a physical construct. This means that the context, to some extent, changes on line both in the production and in the interpretation.

Meaning can be explicit or implicit, and, as a matter of fact, the linguistically encoded — explicit — meaning in discourse is underspecified. Elaborate mental processes are required to fill the gap between the encoded linguistic content and the proposition expressed, which is probably what Aristotle meant by *abduction* and what is referred to as *pragmatic inference* by 20th century linguists (Katz, 1972; Wilson & Sperber, 1981; Carston, 1998; Andersen, 2000). Blass (1990: 31) also emphasizes that in discourse interpretation the contextual assumptions that have been drawn from the context also play a major role.

A descriptive type of text with a coherent situation as its basis easily lends itself to the interpretation of relevance. Argumentative discourse, however, which — due to the characteristics of the genre — allows for some referential ambiguities and ambivalences, is more difficult in terms of the interpretation of the relevance of certain expressions. In natural spoken discourse, relevance and coherence relations seem an even more complex matter, since here the cognitive processes realizing relevance typically arise in the collaboration and interaction of two speakers.

In what follows, I will look at some extracts from natural conversations recorded from BBC Radio, in which the participants' reasoning can be tracked down through the various mental operations they are involved in. My focus is on the interpretation of noun phrases. The examples illustrate how conceptualization is realized in such cognitive processes as specification, exemplification, categorization or metaphorization, and also, how certain rhetorical patterns — schemata -, and utterance functions like evaluation contribute to the unravelling of the intended meaning.

### **3. Informativeness of the noun phrase; conceptual interpretation**

#### **3.1. Underspecification vs. Specification**

In conversation it happens that the reference of a noun phrase is found too vague or too general by one or both of the participants. In such cases, i.e. when the meaning is felt underspecified, for the sake of mutual under-

standing, the meaning is clarified either by the speaker him/herself or by the hearer. The following extracts show how the discourse partners achieve contextual explicitness.

(1) A: Talking of trains, you had **some great trains** in China, didn't you, [pə] as a train spotter

B1: Yes.

~A: which you were # it's sort of Paradise or something like that.

B2: Well, they still have steam trains, of course, which I like, I mean, you know, I think there's what makes train spotting worthwhile. I can't really see the point of train spotting now. ...

In the extract above, the first speaker's vague noun phrase *some great trains* is interpreted by the other speaker as a signal of an indirect elicitation. He understands that he is expected to be more specific, so he provides the information required: *steam trains*. A similar process emerges in the second discourse, where the specification of the unspecific noun phrases *lots of cooperation* and *all sorts of people* is realized by the two speakers in turns. The specification is started by the same speaker, who introduced the general idea, with a list, which is completed with more details by his interviewer, speaker A.

(2) B: Well, we're getting **lots of [kou] cooperation with all sorts of people** and we've got **lots of council departments** opening their doors; the treasury, the environmental office, # [əm] and also a lot of private enterprises, the [leis ?] factories, hotels

A: I have a list: Boots Head Office, Central Television Studio, the City Treasure Department. It's all so marvelous, isn't it?

In the following extract, the topic is speaker's B motivation for his adventurous voyage. He tries to give some reason for his decision to go on a long and risky sailing, but his explanation turns out to be rather vague:

(3) B1: I didn't know where I wanted to go. **The idea** was just to go # so it pointed out to the blue bit of the sea # you know, and I just went. It was good. It was **a good thing** to do.

A: Living out *a fantasy* ?

B2: Yes [ə] yes, it was not a fantasy I've held all my life. It was **just something**.

I thought # I'll do it, I'll just do it # it was it was a # # it was an impulse,  
that's the word.

The interviewee — speaker B — in extract (3) uses two general nouns in his explanation as to why he set out for the long voyage: *the idea, a thing*, which the interviewer, A, tries to specify as *a fantasy*. B seems to accept the interpretation first, but then he corrects himself by particularising this explanation with the noun *impulse*, which he himself evaluates as *the right word*. The exchange reveals a clarification process the milestones of which are nouns with more or less general meaning — *idea, thing, fantasy, something* — and the key, *the right word, an impulse* is in the end found as the most specific and the most appropriate in the eye of the interviewee. The list provides a supply of those nouns that the participants select as acceptable in the current context, but the final choice is made by the participant who is personally the most involved in construing the mental context for the sense selection. Extract (4) is an example of a local interpretation of the concept of *commitment*:

(4) A: A couple of callers so far have used the word **commitment**. So women must have a real commitment, which you clearly have.

B: You have to, you have to prove, it's not so much that you have to prove yourself better than the men, but you have to prove **your commitments: you will not run away and get pregnant and become very emotional at every little outburst**, you have to say I've got to be tough, you have to become one of the lads.

Speaker A, the hostess of the radio phone-in programme, refers to the topic and the context of the conversation by using the word *commitment*, which several callers have used already. It sounds as a general word for speaker B, and she interprets A's general remark as an elicitation for further information. She gives her own interpretation of the concept. Naturally, such an interpretation can only be done on the basis of personal experiences and individual assessment, which provides a local context for the meaning of the noun in her discourse.

The four examples above represent possible forms of the lexicalization of specification. The identification of meaning can happen through a single

phrase — as in extract (1) -, through a list of phrases — as in examples (2) and (3)- or with a more complex form of explanation in a short text, as in extract (4). In all cases, however, the specification is the result of a mental process which establishes coherence in the discourse through relevance.

### 3.2. Exemplification

The meaning of a concept can also be implicated with examples, as it happens in extract (5), in which, commenting on the reporter's remark, Nancy Reagan specifies what her husband's sense of humour was like after he was shot at during a terrorist attack:

(5) A: It is extraordinary though, because he never appears to have lost **his sense of humour** the whole time.

B1: No.

~A: The very first words he said to you were: "honey, I didn't die".

B2: Yeah. "Honey, I forgot to talk."

### 3.3. Categorization

In a discussion of facts, thoughts and beliefs about the world, before participants arrive at some common understanding, they may also categorize things and phenomena. Noun phrases are typical signals of categorization.

(6) A1: You could make somebody under hypnosis kill somebody else. You could make somebody commit murder.

B1: Yes, that has occurred, and that people had been told to go and rob banks.

A2: And?

B2: Well, the most common hypnotic **crime** is rape. That's the one that does not require that the person hypnotised be really in a deep trance. So it's much easier to commit that crime.

The topic of the conversation where the extract comes from is hypnosis, and related to it the concept of crime arises. Through the underlined linguistic units of the extract, a kind of categorization of various hypnotic acts can be tracked down. The reporter, A, in turn A1 gives a specific example of committing crime (*kill somebody else, commit murder*), which is followed by a second type of crime introduced by the other participant — *rob banks* -, and then comes the general noun **crime**, which is the central category, to

introduce yet another member of the category, *rape*. In the following extract, the topic is a type of theatrical performance, the general noun referring to it being *a play*:

(7) A: I thought is it a it was what I was wondering, is it a comedy, or a tragedy, so what's the feeling?

B: Well, what can I say? It is **a** very very funny **play**, but it will also make you cry. So that's all I can say. It's a sort of a saga, you know. ...

The categories involved in the discourse need not be explicitly differentiated for the participants to be able to interpret the meaning. Their world knowledge and their personal experiences usually enable the conversationists to make the appropriate contextual assumptions, as in the following discourse about the one time East Germany and West Germany, which used to be one country and became unified again:

(8) A: Now, you said [dʒəm] no country has been successfully divided for very long. Remember # **Germany** was, I mean unified for over a hundred years or so.

B: [dʒə:mən] there's there's Germany and there's Germany. [ə] there's a still a spiritual Germany which has which is of course [m] many [ə] thousands of years old.

Similarly, it is the implicit differentiation in the meanings of *work* that establishes coherence in discourse (9), and it is due to the cognitive process of categorization on line that — in spite of the lexical repetition and the apparent tautology — no misunderstanding arises between the conversational partners:

(9) B1: But the the the work itself is is **work**.

A1: Of course,

B2: But not acknowledged

~A1: of course,

~B2: as work, because it is not paid. It's [ə]

~A1: very hard work.

### 3.4. Metaphorization

According to the Relevance Theory, the weaker the implicature, the greater the possible discrepancy between the thoughts actually entertained by the participants, but this does not necessarily make the discourse part-

ners dissatisfied. The two extracts, (8) and (9) above, are a good example of this, but, in this respect, the use of metaphors in discourse is a contextually similar case. Metaphors are potentially a source of appraisal, and this involves a great deal of individual assumptions about the meaning of ‘the other mind’. In the following discourse, (10), the participants are obviously ‘on the same wavelength’, which is clear from the metaphors they each use to characterize the actress they are talking about; B calls her *a wonder*, A, *a star*. Besides their conceptual representation, these metaphors signal the attitudes of the speakers as well. Their positive evaluation is well grounded in a series of facts (*a swimming champion, a filmstar, a wonderful swimmer*):

(10) A1: Hmm. Was an American swimming champion,

B1: Oh yes, she was

~A1: and then became a filmstar.

B2: She was a wonder and so beautiful. And she was a wonderful swimmer, wonderful swimmer. She wasn’t very good on dry land. She was very shortsighted, she was very funny on dry land ‘cause she kept bumping into people, I remember,

A (laughs)

~B2: but she was wonderful in the water and very beautiful ‘nd great fun to work with.

A2: Joe Pasternak said: “Wet, she was a star!“

#### 4. Procedural interpretation

The relevance of a contribution in discourse can be attributed to the presence of some cognitive patterns, familiar schemata, which are common both in spoken and in written discourse. Winter (1992, 1994) and Hoey (1983, 1994) describe the phenomenon in a semantic framework of larger text relations, which they call the ‘Problem — Solution’ pattern. I think that familiarity with certain logical schemata like this contributes to the interpretation of certain bits of discourse, and that the processing of their relevance happens through abduction. The semantic relations in the text are typically signalled lexically. In the following extract, the second speaker infers from the lexical meaning of the noun *trouble* that his partner is talking about a Problem and responds accordingly:

(11) A: The **trouble** is that the only way of coming back at you is by coming back at you with the very # stick # which is your stick, really, the stick of the Law.

B: We have rules which govern the way that we conduct our affairs and also the affairs of our clients. # And if we breach any of those particular rules then we are liable to be disciplined. By the Law Society. ....

Problems require Solutions, and B's response is a Response to the Problem, and is supposed to be a Solution. It is this conceptual relation that makes the second speaker's contribution relevant. Such instances of coherence, when, underlying the discourse, one can discover some logical pattern compatible with Winter's and Hoey's text relations, are not uncommon. Here is another example:

(12) A: So, from a sheer protectionist point of view, you fear a unification.

B: I feel the present war is a trade war, it's not a war with with [ə] weapons like we used to have # in history.

What makes the second speaker's response relevant? Obviously, his partner's inference from previous parts of their conversation is that *unification* for him is a Problem. This hypothesis of the first speaker has two lexical signals: the discourse marker *so* and the verb *fear*. B's response is an implicit affirmation: he gives the Reason for his negative feelings about the situation. In extract (13) below, the participants are talking about biometrics in banking. The banking expert — speaker B — evaluates A's hypothetical Situation as a Problem, i.e. a possible situation, which is likely to cause some difficulty:

(13) A: And, obviously, it'll be a lot more secure, 'cause one way or another you are definitely trying to find ways of eliminating plastic cards.

B: (takes a deep breath) # Well, that's one possible future development of it. [ə] **The difficulty** is that the plastic card at the moment doesn't really say who you are, it says who your account numb, I beg your pardon, what your account number is. And and of course your signature doesn't contain your account number, so there there may in fact be need to have the plastic card around as well, but [ə] that remains to be seen.

The lexical signal of the Problem, the noun *difficulty* allows the conversational partner to infer that his proposal is not really supported, and that the response in fact means: *It is not likely to happen*. B's response in the

exchange is an Evaluation as a Problem. Evaluations are typically supported by a Reason or a Basis:

(14) A: You also like to live dangerously. You like, it seems to me that you like to commit yourself to *huge projects* which may or may not flop.

B: [ mm ] Ask my wife about that.

The first speaker in exchange (14) gives an appraisal of the other speaker's way of life, characterising it as dangerous. The following note which he makes about the other person making huge projects does not at all sound irrelevant. Projects may flop, and this is the Reason why he thinks B's way of life is dangerous. In this context such a remark can be interpreted as relevant on the basis of the schema: Evaluation — Reason for the Evaluation. Obviously, familiarity with schemata such as the Problem — Solution, the Situation — Evaluation or the Evaluation — Reason patterns is part of our cognitive environment, and it contributes to our understanding the relevance of each other's discourse.

## 5. Conclusion

In successful communication, the production and the interpretation of thoughts and meanings emerges with the help of a great amount of knowledge — both linguistic and non-linguistic, the latter comprising “world knowledge” as well as knowledge of the local context -, logic and also the participants' mental capacities. Within this cognitive environment, the communication process involves implicatures and inferences realized through abduction. The discourse extracts discussed in the paper reveal that conceptual nouns play a crucial role in the implication of speaker intention. A relevant interpretation by “the other mind” is the result of sense selection in the current context. Due to their unspecific meaning, in natural discourse, vague noun phrases can realize the function of signal of elicitation for further information. When such a speaker intention is recognized by the hearer, the relevant response is the specification of the unspecific. General concepts are commonly interpreted or reinterpreted in the course of communication interactively by the participants through various mental processes, such as exemplification, categorization or metaphorization.

A discourse realizes a complex system of thoughts which frequently manifests common cognitive patterns, familiar schemata. The extracts pre-



sented in the paper show that noun phrases are milestones of the conceptual relationships in schemata; some conceptual nouns like *trouble* or *difficulty*, for example, have the potential for signalling a member of the 'Problem — Solution' rhetorical pattern, which frequently occurs in natural discourse. From the examples provided in the paper, it is obvious that the discourse perspectives of a noun phrase emerge during communication, in the progress of local, contextual interpretation. This creative cognitive process develops in an interaction of the minds of the speaker and the hearer (i.e. the second speaker) through the recognition of the former's intention by the latter.

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# FIGHTING THE BUSINESS WAR

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**Abstract:** *The world of business is frequently depicted in metaphorical terms as a battle field where wars are fought with mass-destruction weapons, bombs are fired and guerilla strategies are used to kill enemies. The present article sets out to answer the question whether war metaphors are cognitively and connotatively appropriate to refer to the business stage as it actually functions.*

**Keywords:** *cognitive appropriateness, connotative appropriateness, war concepts, war metaphors.*

## 1. Introduction

In a world where business matters are fervently discussed in various contexts, from a broad range of perspectives, by people with the most diverse professional and cultural backgrounds, business newspapers and magazines have gained undeniable importance as means by which voices in the field of economics make themselves heard. Even the most superficial glimpse at the articles in these publications leaves the readers amazed at the abundance of war metaphors and concepts used by their authors to talk about subjects of interest in economics.

It is this particular category of metaphors and concepts — gathered from five consecutive issues — January 2006-May 2006 of *Capital*, the most widely read Romanian business monthly — that are analyzed in the present article. The aim of the analysis is to offer a possible interpretation of the cognitive value and implied connotations of the linguistic device under scrutiny.

## 2. On metaphor

The opinions on what a metaphor is range widely from the view that it is a mere poetical device, a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language to the view that all human languages are nothing but strings of

metaphors. Of this multitude of perspectives, more convincing and broadly accepted are the arguments for a broad interpretation of metaphor such as those offered by Avādanei (1994: 7), who states that metaphors are based on "... the qualification or description of certain concepts by means of other concepts" (my translation), or by Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 3) who, likewise, suggest that "the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another".

Besides this frequently quoted view, two other aspects have surfaced more prominently from the thousands of pages written on metaphors — the fact that they are pervasive in our everyday lives and that they are not just a linguistic phenomenon, but one that strongly influences the way we think and act in the world. As far as the former is concerned, Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 3) state that the human conceptual system works on the basis of metaphors — "our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature... Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities. If we are right in suggesting that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor".

Put differently, our language relies heavily on metaphors to convey meaning. At the same time, metaphors systematically structure our understanding of the world around us. Using metaphors, we rely on our previous experience and on what we are already used to and familiar with in order to understand, interpret and talk about what we are less familiar with or do not fully understand. In mapping the well-known to the unknown, "the metaphor selects, emphasizes, suppresses, and organizes features of the main subject by implying statements about it that normally apply to the subsidiary subject" (Black, 1962: 44-45).

Another way of understanding the relationship between metaphors and our perception of reality is, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) suggest, that metaphors tend to exert a sort of perceptual hegemony over how the things they are used to characterize are perceived. In other words, they may bring certain features to the foreground, while leaving others in the background, especially those that are incompatible with the chosen metaphor. In the extreme case of this perceptual shaping, metaphors can "generate" realities, as Schon (1979) says. Or, in Goatly's (1997: 155) words, "metaphor ...

is not a mere reflection of a pre-existing objective reality but a construction of reality. Through a categorization entailing the selection of some features as critical and others as non-critical ... metaphors can consciously be used to construct ... reality". By so influencing our way of understanding things, phenomena and relationships, quite often, metaphors cease to be perceived as implied comparisons and become literalized.

Metaphors are undoubtedly part of our cognitive system, but they do more than shape realities in a particular way. They also convey emotional connotations, evoke and carry feelings and attitudes so that the metaphorical interpretation of the things and phenomena around us goes beyond cognition and involves the affective level as well. In the following sections, I shall approach the war metaphors and concepts in the business articles analyzed against this dual background.

### 3. War metaphors in business articles

The following war metaphors and concepts have been selected from the corpus (the excerpts are given in my own translation from Romanian into English):

- **Business is a battle**

"They sell now either because they need money or because they want to speculate the favorable moment on the market, when *a real battle* will take place for office building."

"She will lead Connex-Vodafone to *battles* on various battlefields. In terms of income and profitability, she *will fight* their eternal rival, Orange."

"*The battle* on the domestic routes ... will be a battle over tariffs."

"*The fight* will be more and more difficult, with two other players entering the market."

"*The fight* between sellers and buyers is in equilibrium at the moment."

"*The fight* on the mobile phones market is getting harsher."

- **Business is war**

"Avoiding *a war* of prices is essential to stay in the business."

"Electrica announces *a bloody war* between the ex-monopolies and the new comers on the market."

"AOL is trying to relaunch the old Netscape and to restart *the old war* with Internet Explorer."

“The leu has gone to *war* with the euro and the dollar.”

- **Business-specific elements or business people are enemies**

“The taxation system used to be *a terrible enemy*.”

“In Romania, besides the reduced purchasing power, *an important enemy* of the DVD player sellers is the black market.”

“The credit in lei might become *the new enemy* of the Central Bank.”

- **Killing is frequent in business**

“The leader may develop or *may kill* a business.”

“The gun proves to be a gun meant *to kill* the transparency on the Romanian TV market.”

“The executive *would kill* a prosperous business such as that of the leasing companies.”

“The installments *have killed* the sales of second-hand TVs.”

- **The business war is fought by various means, regarded as weapons**

“*The main weapon* Cora uses in order to attack is the price hyper-offer.”

“The billboard effect ... leads to an asymmetric and aggressive relationship between the small shops and the supermarkets, the bigger ones swallowing the smaller with the help of *the advertising weapon*.”

“Local developers are *the secret weapon*, those that have to adapt the Microsoft products to the clients’ needs.”

- **Bombs are thrown in the business war**

“The governor of the National Bank *has dropped a real bomb*: salaries will increase three times in the following years.”

“This is *a bomb advertisement*: ‘get a Logan with *Jurnalul național*’.”

“The RDS — RCS group has come up with *a ‘bomb’ product*.”

- **Guerilla strategies are used in the business war**

“There is *a guerilla strategy* on the market — you have to sell cheap in order to succeed.”

“I am *a guerilla manager*.”

“The banks are fighting *a guerilla battle* with the monetary authority.”

“*Guerilla selling* means breaking with conventions, using time, energy and imagination.”

### **3.1. War metaphors in business articles as cognitive and connotative, ideational tools**

Judged from a cognitive perspective, the business war metaphors may be said to be, at least to a certain extent, appropriate in describing the reality they refer to. There are many similarities between military and business campaigning, for example. These occur in the following areas:

- Competition: business and war are each a form of competition involving two or more adversaries striving to gain advantage or to achieve victory;
- Strategy and planning: strategy and planning play a vital role both during war and in business and can determine their outcome;
- Resources: both war and business face significant logistic issues that require the organization and projection of people and resources;
- Competencies: both military and business people must have a set of necessary professional competencies in order to achieve their goals;
- Leadership: leaders are critical for the success of both war and business and are certainly a decisive factor in bringing about gains or losses in both contexts;
- Intelligence: intelligence is an attribute without which success in an army at war or in a business is impossible. Soldiers and businesspeople must be intelligent themselves and, at the same time, able to detect and appropriately use other people’s intelligence;

If the metaphors and concepts under discussion function appropriately in referential terms, the question remains whether they are equally appropriate from an ideational, connotative perspective.

### **3.2. Dodging the business war**

It is only recently that women have fought wars in the front line. For a long time, fights have been meant for men only. They were considered the perfect events for them to prove their courage, self-possession, determination and, why not, aggression, violence and cruelty. Thus, the image that an implied comparison of war and business brings to the mind is that of a masculine world from which women are either altogether excluded or in which they play minor roles that will never be as important as men’s. War

metaphors and concepts function as “masculinization devices” (Koller, 2004: 5), an opinion backed, for example, by Fleishman (2001: 485), who states that “to the extent that war is still a largely male enterprise, the war metaphor [and concepts] subtly reinforce ... traditional gender bias”. “Since war can be considered a ‘quintessentially masculine activity and an essential test of manhood’ (Wilson, 1992: 892), its metaphoric usage helps to marginalize, if not eliminate, metaphoric femininity and, consequently, position actual women as an out-group in business” (Koller, 2004: 5).

However, it is an undeniable fact that women have had a remarkable presence in business and have reached top positions in numerous companies around the world. How have they survived on the business battle field and how have they won so numerous fights in a world where everybody can be a fierce enemy trying to mercilessly kill them? Judging by the connotation of war metaphors and concepts, one might think that the only chance women have in order to walk on the same paths as men in business is to become masculine, to embrace what have been traditionally considered manly attributes (in the context of war, mentioned above, courage, self-possession, determination, aggression, violence, cruelty).

A number of interviews with top business women published in *Capital*, the same journal I collected the quoted metaphors and concepts from, contradict this assumption. They describe success not in terms of a fierce battle that one may win on condition that one annihilates feelings such as love, compassion, regret, sorrow, but as a consequence of admitting the very feminine nature of which such feelings are characteristic. Below are some of their answers to the question “What makes a successful woman?” that illustrate the respondents’ rather “sentimental” perception of the matter. To be a successful woman means (my translation):

Iuliana Stoicescu, managing partner, CMC:

- To live your dreams. “Courage” comes from the Latin *cor*, meaning “heart”. So courage means to listen to your heart.
- To have the courage to face your fears, the fear of losing, of being rejected, of being humiliated, of remaining penniless, of speaking in public, of being successful.

Anca Maria Harasim, executive manager, the American Chamber of Commerce in Romania:

- To enjoy every day of your life, even on Mondays;
- To feel rich, even if just for the friends that you have gathered around you;



- To be generous to those to whom life hasn't given much and to prove to them that one can be a winner even if one starts from the second place;
- To see the full half of the glass, without ignoring the empty one.

Mădălina Crețu, commercial manager for Romania, Malev Airlines:

- Successful women are those who know how to be beautiful, smart, nice, optimistic, imaginative, full of initiative, hard-working, we who ask for and give everything.

Corina Licea, human resources manager, Alison Hayer, Romania:

- To have a life full of interesting people, from whom I can learn and find out how much there is still for me to discover;
- To have lots of friends I can be proud of, who enrich my soul every day;
- To get phone calls from people I used to work with who tell me that I meant something for them, that I changed their lives for the better;
- To see places that can stir up my emotions.

#### 4. Conclusion

The conclusion prompted by the above presentation is that, although the war metaphors and concepts in business may be (even if not fully) appropriate from a referential point of view (the implied comparison between the world of business and war is based on some obvious, shared characteristics), by favouring such metaphors, what journalists create and constantly reinforce in their readers' cognition is a masculinized model of the business world which fails to capture what women bring to this world. According to what women themselves say, if they are fighting the war of success in business, they are doing it with traditionally feminine weapons, and not by "throwing bombs" or "killing their enemies" in the company next door.

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# THE RISE OF THE MIDDLE PASSIVE IN MODERN ENGLISH

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**Abstract:** *The paper discusses the increasing number of originally transitive verbs used as middles in Modern English (The shirt irons well), and attempts to categorize them and suggest reasons for their recent spread. Observations will also be made on their equivalents in other languages, e.g. Spanish, which may use the reflexive passive (or other constructions) to convey the nuances of English middles.*

**Keywords:** *English grammar, ergatives, middle voice, passivization, reflexivization.*

## 1. Introduction

One of the most important properties of English verbs which renders the verbal category highly flexible is the ability to have both a transitive and an intransitive valency without any change in the morphology. Thus *to break* can be used transitively in the sentence *The boy broke the vase* and intransitively in *The vase broke*. Similarly, the verb *to change* can be used transitively and intransitively in the following two sentences:

The girl changed her appearance.  
Her appearance changed.

Many other verbs apart from *to break* and *to change* operate in the same way and are often referred to in grammar books as “ergative”. The verbs *bend, bounce, drop, explode, freeze, grow, improve, melt, move, shut, split, tear, turn* represent just a small sample, though the adaptability of the verb to the pattern will be determined by the kind of subject or object involved, i.e. semantic restrictions will play a role in determining syntactic patterning. Many verbs lack the intransitive use so, whereas both of the following sentences are acceptable

Sweat burned my eyes.  
My eyes burned,

only the transitive use is usual with the verb *to gut*, to mention just one example:

The fire gutted the building. \*The building gutted (intr).

If we make *The building* the subject of this sentence, we are obliged to use either the passive voice or a different verb (possibly a phrasal verb) that admits a passive meaning:

The building was gutted.  
The building burned right through.

Compare also the case of *to destroy*, which lacks an intransitive use, but whose meaning can be expressed by the neologism *to self-destruct* in Modern English in intransitive constructions:

THIS MESSAGE WILL self-destruct in five minutes. Thus began Mission Impossible ... (Collins Cobuild, 2006).

It seems as though they have a subconscious desire to self-destruct — perhaps to relieve the pressure of office (Collins Cobuild, 2006).

Just as certain verbs, like *to gut* and *to destroy*, lack an intransitive use, there are others, like *to die* and *to fall*, that lack a transitive application. The transitive meaning of these verbs has to be conveyed through different lexemes, which may be simplex, like *to kill* and *to fell*, or phrasal, like *to cause the death of* or *to knock/bring down*:

The blast killed two people. (The blast caused the death of two people.)

\*The blast died two people.

Heracles, the hero as ever, fells him with a single arrow... (CCCS)

(Heracles, the hero as ever, brings him down with a single arrow.)

\*Heracles, the hero as ever, falls him with a single arrow...

Although, as we have already seen, intransitive verbs are abundant in English and are common in the range of syntactic patterns of the language, intransitive use of verbal lexemes that are primarily transitive is a phenomenon that has become noticeably more popular only in recent times. The occurrence is not entirely unknown to previous periods of the history of

English: witness the Shakespearian example *were* ‘wear’, i.e. ‘are worn’ quoted by Denison [1993: 392], and the following example from a much more modern piece of literature, *Animal Farm*:

There were times when it seemed to the animals that they worked longer hours and *fed* no better than they had done in Jones’s day (Orwell, 2000 [1945]: 61).

But it is only more recently that the number of verbs adapting to the new model appears to be rising appreciably. Note just one example from a contemporary novel:

School will be letting out soon (McGovern, 2007:206).

(i.e. ‘They will soon be letting the children out of school.’)

To take another example that has been around for some time in American English (AmE), observe how the verb *to hurt* has been extended to intransitive constructions with animate subjects, as illustrated by the last two examples below, in which the meaning of ‘hurting’ is something like ‘feeling upset, unhappy, offended’:

I hurt my leg coming down the mountain.

My leg hurts / is hurting.

I’ve never consciously tried to hurt anyone.

Everyone was hurting so much. The atmosphere was thick with anger (CCCS).

Martha’s going through a divorce and really hurting right now (LDOCE).

As we have seen, middles adopt an active-voice syntactic pattern, but the subject-verb relationship is notionally passive. As Rosta says (1995:123), “The traditional view of them is that they are ‘active in form but passive in sense’”.

The special properties of prototypical English middles are that no agent is mentioned. As the agent is demoted or ignored, they tend to emphasize an inherent property of the subject: *This car drives well* suggests that it is the outstanding mechanical performance of the car that allows it to be driven so effortlessly, over and above the skill of the driver. Similarly, *You photograph well* suggests that there is something about you personally that contributes to your having a pleasing appearance in photographs; in a word, you are photogenic. However, it must be added that, just how much the subject contributes to the action fulfilled in the verb depends on each individual context and the possible degree of interaction between subject and

verb. Middle constructions often include an adverb of manner (*well, easily, fast*) and/or a modal verb (*can, will*), and the clause in which they occur is sometimes negative, as in the second of the following examples:

The crowds are the biggest the bookshop has seen and the book is selling faster than any the publisher has known. (BNC)

This car won't steer properly.

The verb *to rage* (< Latin RABIES 'madness') may have originally been pressed into service as an intransitive verb through the influence of phonetically similar *to rave*, with which it appears to overlap in Modern English. But be that as it may, it provides interesting confirmation of the blurring of the concept of transitivity in present-day English, since it is sometimes found in sentences like the following, in which it is followed by a noun clause object:

Re. Julie Nicholson, who lost her daughter in the July 2005 bombing: I rage that a human being could choose to take another human's life (*Time Magazine*, 20/3/06).

## 2. Categorization and reasons for the proliferation of middles in English

In Rosta's view (1995:124), "The membership of the mediopassive category is open: a verb of any lexeme can be a mediopassive providing that it has the appropriate syntactic structure. This is in contrast to, say, the category of modals; a verb's membership of the modal category must be stated explicitly in the grammar". However, "Actual usage of mediopassives is further constrained by their semantics."

Consider the following two examples:

\*This cat strokes well.

This text photocopied well.

The first example is not possible, because there is nothing about some cats that makes them intrinsically more strokeable than others. On the other hand, the second example strikes us as acceptable owing to the fact that some texts will be easier to photocopy than others because the original is clearer or inscribed on a type of paper that can be photocopied without difficulty. As an extension of this last example, note that it is possible to con-

vey the idea of complete exoneration of the agent by laying blame on the grammatical subject in middle constructions:

The page photocopied too low. (Blame laid on page or photocopying machine)

The rifle fired. (Implying that it was not the user's fault)

Since middles are not a formal category in English — i.e. they have no inflection that marks them, it is not possible to identify a specific number of them by their morphology. For this reason, it is difficult to search for instances in corpora (even using programmes like CLAWS, which is a part-of-speech tagger and allows you to search, for example, for cases of typical adverbs, like *well* and *beautifully*, that are known to often modify middles), since specific verb forms do not tend to be tagged as middles. Accordingly, for Keyser and Roeper (1984: 414), middles are a syntactic category, not a lexical one. In order to adduce observations on their incidence, therefore, it seems more promising to look at the actual styles of language, the genres, in which they tend to occur.

They crop up frequently in colloquial language, where their brevity is an obvious motivation, like text messaging on mobile phones: *I don't hit very easily* (said by somebody who had been in a war zone) is syntactically more direct than *It is not easy to hit me* as it is less morphemically complex, and directs interest towards the speaker and his claim to invulnerability in a very concise and compact way. Examples are commonly found, too, in slang expressions, like *I completely spaced out during the lecture*.

Middles are also found in scientific language, e.g. in Phonetics, where conciseness is a definite stylistic preference, too:

The glide triggers assibilation of [t] and then deletes.

[t] lenites when it is internuclear.

Other sources include the social sciences, like Psychology, or texts that contain psychological terminology:

People who self-harm do have a choice.

She stopped drinking but started obsessing about her weight. (Collins, 2006)

Further examples from the field of science are:

The target tracks well. (Looking at a radar screen)

Clearly the word “privatisation” does not translate easily into Romanian. (CCCS)

Keyser and Roeper (1984: 390) comment on the readiness with which verbs ending in -ize and which are used in scientific or technical language become middles, quoting examples like *ergativize* and *demagnetize* (The recording head demagnetized), but they also point out that semantic restrictions block the use as middles of some others like *authorize* and *capitalize*. Instructions and descriptions of products tend to use middle constructions for their grammatical simplicity and directness: *stows on floor*, *loads from top*. Consider also:

Mosquito netting: both inner doors are fully protected by netting which zips up independently from the door flap. (BNC)

The car drives beautifully, in fact the throttle response from the 1870cc engine is almost petrol sharp. (BNC)

The text scrolls horizontally instead of vertically.

The paint applies evenly.

Press “Repeat” once and the current track plays/will play repeatedly.

The machine switches off automatically.

Journalese also exploits middles. The first example below is a typical announcement that sensationalizes a piece of news and tries to give the impression of energy and dynamism behind the start of an operation; the other examples have a similar kind of impact:

The campaign will launch in October with support from a Lilly education grant. (Balance [magazine for diabetics], July/August 2007)

In 2001, the medical-relief organization Médecins sans Frontières began sending staff to Lampedusa to treat the near-dead immigrants who wash up on its shores. (Time Magazine, 22/12/03)

... 71% of the class branched into combat units and could deploy to Iraq or Afghanistan as little as a year from now. (Time Magazine, 30/5/05)

Mr White, a farmer who has lived almost all his life on Wallasea Island on the Essex coast near Southend, was nearly killed that night when the sea wall protecting the island breached. (Guardian Weekly, July 2006)

Another common source of middles is advertizing. The following comments on the web concerning satisfaction over smoke emissions from car



engines and plane engines (examples 1 and 2, respectively) show an intransitive use of to smoke that also crops up in advertisements for cigarettes or tobacco-related products (example 3):

GTA 4 tire smoke better than Forza's.

I've found four-strokes smoke better than a comparably sized two-stroke.

Estate pipes smoke better than new pipes.

Many further examples of middles can be found in bureaucratic language or *officialese*, such as is typical of announcements

Flight BA0486 to Barcelona is now boarding at Gate 15.

The wine retails at £6.95 a bottle. (LDOCE)

Naturally, in the creation of new middles there is overgeneralization of an existing pattern. Analogy is a powerful force in language processes and the more verbs that adopt the middle pattern, the more verbs that are likely to follow suit. It must also be remembered that English is characterized by a rigid word order as compared to some other languages (see, for example, the case of the Slavonic languages, mentioned below). If movement of subjects and objects is restricted, then thematic roles may be shifted in compensation: in middles, the grammatical subject takes on the thematic role of patient. It is also the sentence topic and, as such, has wider scope over the whole sentence.

### 3. Equivalent in some other languages

It seems appropriate in a paper of a general nature of this kind to proffer some data on middles or expression of "middle" concepts in languages other than English and to see whether there are any particular linguistic conditions or circumstances that favour their use in particular languages. It is a well-known fact that Ancient Greek marked the middle voice in the aorist and future tenses of verbs and thus distinguished these forms from passives. There also appears to have been a middle passive of some form in Gothic: "Greek passive constructions may be translated with the Gothic medio-passive in the present..." (Lehmann, 1994:36).

The language most familiar to me after English is Spanish, which has a reflexive passive (*No se asusta fácilmente* 'He doesn't scare easily'), and a number of intransitive passives (*Se está bien aquí* 'it's good here'; cf.

Portuguese *Gosta-se da praia* ‘People like the beach’), which would be the translation equivalents of English middles (see Mott, 2006). Interestingly, Spanish occasionally has passive syntax with active meaning: (*Estoy*) *bien comido y bien dormido*, lit. ‘I am well eaten and well slept’, i.e. ‘I have eaten and slept well’ (cf. English *He is well read*).

There are plenty of examples of dynamic intransitive verbs in Spanish, just like the ones quoted at the beginning of this paper for English (melt, split, bend, bounce, and so on): *acabar*, *empezar*, *amanecer*, *oscurecer*, *cambiar*, *explotar*, *crecer*, *nacer*, *casar* [regional and formal], and many more, and the subject tends to follow the verb when they express motion, location or change of state, as it fulfils the role of patient, thus having the same role as the object of a transitive verb. However, middles with no morphological marking like the English prototypes seem to be much rarer. I have seen the following: *Esto no vende* ‘This doesn’t sell’; *Windows está cerrando* ‘Windows is closing’; *Bueno, ya van pintando poco a poco* ‘Well, they (= the tomatoes) are gradually ripening’ (Espinàs, 2006:78).

As in English, in scientific texts, like those on Phonetics, and perhaps, sometimes, through the influence of original texts in English, there are cases of middles: *no palataliza* ‘it doesn’t palatalize’, *no asoma a final de palabra* ‘it does not appear in word-final position’, etc. In Brazilian Portuguese, impersonal constructions can lose the pronoun “se”, thus approximating in form to the prototypical English middle: *aqui (se) come bem = aqui comem bem* ‘people eat well here’ (Parkinson, 1988: 161).

There are ample relics of the middle posited for Indo-European in Latin deponent verbs like *LOQUITUR* ‘he speaks’, for which no morphological active form exists (The ending *-ITUR* otherwise formed an impersonal passive: e.g. *CURRITUR*, literally ‘it is run’, i.e. ‘people run’).

According to Baldi (1987: 45), “Germanic has no traces of the middle” (perhaps referring to a morphologically marked middle voice?), Nevertheless, Danish has the verbal ending *-s*, from reduction of the reflexive pronoun *sig* ‘himself/herself/itself’, which forms a synthetic passive (*Dette æg kan ikke spises* ‘This egg cannot be eaten’), and apparently this same ending may confer a “middle” reading on certain verbs, which, in this case, undergo further phonetic reduction.: “Some verbs have a middle which is often spelled like the synthetic passive but is pronounced with a shortened vowel or loss of [ə]” (Haberland, 1994: 335). For example, *slås*

with a long vowel is the passive of *slá* 'to kill', but with a short vowel it is a middle.

As far as the Slavonic languages are concerned, the passive form of the verb is less common because of the flexibility of word order, so the change of perspective in the transformation *Peter killed Paul* > *Paul was killed by Peter* can be expressed in Czech and Slovak, for example, by reversing the syntactic order, which does not produce ambiguity because the object is case-marked: *Petr zabil Pavla* > *Pavla zabil Petr* (Short, 1987: 120).

Similarly, in Russian, *MAXIM defends Victor* can be expressed unambiguously as:

Viktora zaščičaet Maksim

since *Viktora* has the accusative case-ending *-a* and the syntactic relations are therefore explicit in the morphology (Van Valin, 2001: 329).

What we have said about Czech, Slovak and Russian may not be the whole story, since in a later publication Short (1993:485) adds: "Voice is a two-member verbal category, active and passive, though some types have led to periodic discussion of a possible middle voice in Czech". Czech certainly has impersonal passives like *Celý večer se tancovalo*, literally 'All evening it was danced', as does German, in which they may be non-reflexive, and may or may not include a formal subject (Eisberg, 1994: 379): (*es*) *wird getanzt* (lit. '[it] will be danced'). Browne (1993: 333) provides interesting information on Serbo-Croat impersonal passives: "Some Western dialects and recent Croatian codifications can keep the underlying object in the accusative": *knigu se piše* (instead of *kniga*, nominative) 'The book is being written'.

#### 4. Conclusions

The question of why middle constructions should have increased in English in modern times is not hard to answer in view of the obvious appeal of syntactic simplification. What remains more difficult to specify is exactly which verbs are candidates for middle voice use. Semantics and text genre appear to play a role. I would also venture the opinion that middles in English are more likely to be common words in the vocabulary than uncommon items, though they may not necessarily be core words or superordinates. For example, *This bread slices well* sounds as correct as *This bread*

*cuts well*, even though *slice* is a hyponym of *cut*, but *This wood saws well* does not sound so likely. Similarly, *The chicken fried quickly* sounds acceptable, but *The chicken broiled quickly* sounds more dubious.

Perhaps it is significant that this synthetic, as opposed to analytical, kind of syntax has been favoured in the history of English. In early Modern English, we find expressions like *The meal was eating* and *The house was (a-)building* with passive meaning; it is not until the late eighteenth century that the more analytical combinations of passive and progressive like *The meal was being eaten* and *The house was being built* arise (Barber, 1997: 188; Denison, 1993: 393; Fennel, 2001: 145). We should also mention the use of the gerund instead of the passive infinitive in Modern English in the construction *The house needs/wants cleaning*. Thus, there are precedents in English syntax for the present-day proliferation of middles.

It is also noteworthy that analytical and synthetic syntax often rotate in the history of individual languages. For example, the Classical Latin synthetic future derived from earlier analytical forms. In the development from Latin to Spanish, there was first reversion to an analytical structure (*amar* + *he*, lit. 'to love' + 'I have'), but this in turn later became synthetic (*amaré*, lit. 'I have to love', i.e. 'I shall love'). Since the seventeenth century, it would appear that the analytical future constructed with *ir a* 'to be going to' has slowly gained ground and taken over from some instances of the synthetic future (Sáez Godoy, 1968: 1879-1880, 1889). In English, in the case of the *will*-future, there seems to be a move towards fusion, as *will* has lost much of its modality and now expresses mostly temporality, often reducing to the clitic form *'ll* (see Mott and Estapà, 1989). In view of this evidence, it does not seem unlikely that the present trend towards synthesis in English, manifest in the cliticization of *will* and the proliferation of middles, may at some later date reverse and give way once again to a tendency towards more analytical modes of expression.

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