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MISCELLANEOUS ARTICLES

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'Taking Sides with the Princess':
Sarah Green's *Private History of the Court of England* (1808) between Scandal Fiction and Historical Novel

Abstract: Sarah Green's *Private History of the Court of England* is, in L.M. Wilson's words, a "political-social satire in the 'secret history' or satirical *roman-à-clef* mode", which was published anonymously in 1808. Under the cover of its fifteenth-century setting, the novel presents the reader with the secret history of contemporary celebrities. More interestingly, by drawing parallels between the early reign of Edward IV and the present, the narrative engages with the Delicate Investigation into the conduct of Princess Caroline of Brunswick, which took place in 1806. In spite of its countless naiveties and anachronisms, this work is still worth studying, as it inventively and intriguingly fuses two novelistic modes that were extremely popular at the time: the scandal novel, which had its brief heyday in the years 1806-1811, and the newly formed historical novel. In so doing, it offers a valuable insight into the socio-cultural and, even more remarkably, the *literary* panorama of the politically turbulent pre-Regency years.

Keywords: Regency. Scandal Fiction. Historical Novel.

The Private History of the Court of England is a historical novel set in the fifteenth century that, by drawing parallels between the early reign of Edward IV and the present, engages with the Delicate Investigation into the conduct of Princess Caroline of Brunswick, which took place in 1806. The work was published anonymously in 1808 and, though its modern editor, Fiona Price, asserts that the critical reaction was "divided",[1] reviewers almost unanimously condemned the novel. *The Monthly Review* decreed it to be a "clumsy fiction" that "[might] be safely left to itself".[2] *The Satirist* found it "disappoint[ing]", and described it as "a mutilated, dull, and disjointed history concerning the rival houses of York and Lancaster, most awkwardly interlarded with trite allusions to events of modern times".[3] *The Critical Review*, on its part, went so far as to declare: "this is one of the few instances in which we are almost induced to form a wish for new restrictions on the liberty of the press".[4]

Actually, the only positive assessment came from *Flowers of Literature*, whose reviewer thought it was "an ingenious satire" and called it "a *mathematical* book; for it treats wholly of parallels". This critic recognised that there was "considerable ingenuity displayed", but, at the same time, he admitted that "unless the reader [was] intimately acquainted with the memoirs of the great world, he [would] frequently stumble in his judgment and err in his applications; the real events of both ages being so mingled". Then, he proceeded to "con-

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[1] S. Green, *The Private History of the Court of England*, ed. F. Price, London and New York, Routledge, (1808) 2011, p. vii.

[2] *The Monthly Review; Or Literary Journal, Enlarged*, 58, January 1809, p. 101.

[3] *The Satirist, or Monthly Meteor*, 2, May 1808, pp. 288-89.

[4] *The Critical Review, or, Annals of Literature*, 3rd ser., 14, June 1808, p. 218.

fess" candidly that his "ignorance of many events of several preceding years disqualifie[d] [him] from forming a competent opinion of the work, as its merit must rest chiefly upon the truth of the various incidents and comparisons".[5] Thus, quite ironically, the only favourable review was written by an avowedly incompetent critic. Besides that, both *Flowers of Literature* and *The Private History* were published by the same printer – B. Crosby and Co. of Stationers' Court – who obviously had an interest in promoting his novels.

However, despite such adverse criticism, the book proved popular in its time. It underwent a second edition in the same year, and it was the first published work of an author who went on to write at least sixteen novels between 1808 and 1825, and became "one of the most prolific women writers of satirical novels in the early nineteenth century".[6] Unquestionably, due to its prolixity, repetitiveness and relentless moralising, The *Private History* proves challenging for today's reader. Nevertheless, in spite of this and of its countless naiveties and anachronisms, this work is interesting insofar as it intriguingly fuses two novelistic modes that were extremely popular at the time – the scandalous secret history and the historical novel – and offers a valuable insight into the cultural and, even more remarkably, the *literary* panorama of the pre-Regency years.

First of all, it is important to highlight the connection between scandal fiction as a narrative mode and the rise of modern celebrity culture. Thanks to the media's expanding reach and the development of an "apparatus of celebrity",[7] the late eighteenth century witnessed an explosion of this phenomenon, which stemmed specifically from "the interplay between individual and institutions, markets and media".[8] In Joseph Roach's words, at this time "celebrity culture fully emerged as a quasi devotional force in the secular public sphere".[9] The popularity of scandal fiction in the period under scrutiny fed on celebrity culture, and a novel like *The Private History* – which owed its success to the public's appetite for the secret history of royals, aristocrats and actresses – would not have been written if those figures had not already acquired by that time a celebrity status. Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody open their study on celebrity by defining their subject as "the condition

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[5] F. BLAGDON, "Introduction: Novellists [*sic*]", in *Flowers of Literature, for 1808 & 1809*, London, J.G. Barnard for B. Crosby and Co., 1810, p. lxx.

[6] L.M. WILSON, "British Women Writing Satirical Novels in the Romantic Period. Gendering Authorship and Narrative Voice", *Romantic Textualities: Literature and Print Culture, 1780-1840*, 17, Summer 2007, p. 29. For biographical information on Sarah Green, see *The Corvey Novels Project at the University of Nebraska — Studies in British Literature of the Romantic Period* —, http://english.unl.edu/sbehrendt/Corvey/html/Projects/ CorveyNovels/Green/BridegroomBio.htm (last accessed on 20 August 2020), and http://english.unl.edu/ sbehrendt/Corvey/html/Projects/CorveyNovels/Green/Gretna%20Green%20Marriages%20bio.htm   (last accessed on 20 August 2020). According to the compilers of the website *Orlando*, "Sarah Green wrote most fictional forms available to her" and "was one of the ten most prolific novelists of 1800-19" (*Orlando: Women's Writing in the British Isles from the Beginnings to the Present*, Cambridge, CUP Online, 2006, http://orlando. cambridge.org/public/svPeople?person_id=greesa [last accessed on 29 October 2020]).

[7] T. MOLE, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity: Industrial Culture and the Hermeneutic of Intimacy*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p. 16. "The term [*apparatu*s] encompasses the individual, the industry and the audience that combine to produce the celebrity phenomenon and acknowledges that these elements come together at a specific historical moment" (*ibidem*, p. 6).

[8] M. LUCKHURST and J. MOODY (eds), *Theatre and Celebrity in Britain, 1660-2000*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p. 1.

[9] J. ROACH, "Celebrity Culture and the Problem of Biography", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 65 (4), Winter 2014, p. 471. According to Tom Mole, the genesis of modern celebrity culture "is historically specific. […] we've had celebrities since the late eighteenth century and a celebrity culture since the beginning of the nineteenth" (T. MOLE, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity*, p. 1).

of being much talked about"[10] and scandal fiction, which had its brief heyday in the years 1806-1811, *throve* on gossip. Scandal fiction also prospered on "notoriety", another concept explored in celebrity studies and related to terms such as "controversy […], scandal […] and sensation".[11] However, when approaching this narrative mode, the most useful concept is a *third* category, which stands between celebrity and notoriety. I am referring to what Clara Tuite has called "scandalous celebrity" and applied to George Gordon, Lord Byron, a personality who played a central role in the Regency period. Indeed, those narratives flourished thanks to this "new form of ambivalent fame that mediate[d] between notoriety and traditional forms of heroic renown".[12]

In what has been called "the novelistic age", demand for and production of novels increased exponentially, also because of the change in copyright law that took place in 1774. Prices dropped, and the circulating library system widened the reading public in an unprecedented way. New popular subgenres, like the gothic and the sentimental novel, emerged.[13] These novelties in the production and consumption of printed materials – first and foremost the spread of circulating libraries – were also crucial in the formation of "a celebrity culture in the modern sense", since this required precisely "the growth of a modern industry of production, promotion and distribution, and a modern audience, massive, anonymous, socially diverse and geographically distributed".[14] As far as that peculiar, popular, novelistic subgenre called 'scandal fiction' is concerned, "selling celebrity"[15] became a productive business primarily thanks to the publisher James Fletcher Hughes, who reinvigorated the tradition of the political satirical *roman à clef* inaugurated in Britain by Delarivier Manley's *The New Atalantis* (1709), a Tory "secret history" that exposed members of the Whig cabinet (whose real names were revealed in a "key") by presenting a combination of political and love intrigues.[16]

Hughes specialised in *topical* scandal fictions, which Walter Scott labelled as "Tale[s] of the Times" in his *incipit* to *Waverley* (1814), and described as "a dashing sketch of the fashionable world, a few anecdotes of private scandal thinly veiled, and if lusciously painted so much the better".[17] The prototype of the so-called 'season fictions' was T.S. Surr's *A Winter in London; or, Sketches of Fashion*, published in 1806. Numerous imitations followed, which similarly boasted 'season' titles: *A Summer at Brighton* (1807) by Mary Julia Young, who also authored *A Summer at Weymouth* (1808); the pseudonymous

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[10] M. LUCKHURST and J. MOODY (eds), *Theatre and Celebrity in Britain, 1660-2000*, p. 1.

[11] *Ibidem*, p. 6.

[12] C. TUITE, *Lord Byron and Scandalous Celebrity*, Cambridge, CUP, 2015, p. iv.

[13] See A.H. STEVENS, *British Historical Fiction before Scott*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 1-2.

[14] T. MOLE, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity*, p. 10. On circulating libraries, see A.H. STEVENS, *British Historical Fiction before Scott*, ch. 3.

[15] M. LUCKHURST and J. MOODY (eds), *Theatre and Celebrity in Britain, 1660-2000*, p. 8.

[16] See C. TUITE, "Celebrity and Scandalous Fiction", in P. GARSIDE and K. O'BRIEN (eds), *The Oxford History of the Novel in English. Volume II: English and British Fiction 1750-1820*, Oxford, OUP, 2015, p. 388. A precedent for this kind of fiction were the *chroniques scandaleuses*, which originated in France in the second half of the seventeenth century and became extremely popular not only in France, but also in England, where, during the reigns of Charles II and James II, writers both translated the French romances and produced their own variants. The Tory polemicist Delarivier Manley continued the tradition into the reign of Queen Anne, and, in *Memoirs of Europe, Towards the Close of the Eighth Century* (1710), "related present-day scandal about her political enemies such as Sarah Churchill, Duchess of Marlborough under the cover of a historical setting" (A.H. STEVENS, *British Historical Fiction before Scott*, p. 25).

[17] W. SCOTT, *Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since*, ed. C. LAMONT, Oxford, OUP, (1814) 2015, p. 4.

Orlando's *A Summer by the Sea* (1807); the anonymous *A Winter in Bath* (1807) and Mrs E.G. Bayfield's *A Winter at Bath* (1807); the fictitious Charles Sedley's *A Winter in Dublin* (1808); J.P. Hurstone's *An Autumn at Cheltenham* (1808) and Honoria Scott's *A Winter in Edinburgh* (1810).[18] All these novels focused on the secret lives of the rich and powerful, and claimed "to unfold the mysteries of high life, not least the secret origins of 'illegitimate' children".[19] This is the judgement that Scott, again, passed on this fictional mode in *The Quarterly Review* of May 1810:

We have now the lowest denizens of Grub-street narrating, under the flimsy veil of false names, and through the medium of a fictitious tale, all that malevolence can invent and stupidity propagate concerning private misfortunes and personal characters. We have our Winters in London, Bath, and Brighton, of which it is the dirty object to drag forth the secret history of the day, and to give to Scandal a court of written record.[20]

Crammed with innuendos and featuring the names of fashionable people in lightly disguised form, these works were unsurprisingly considered slanderous. In the "Postscript" to Sedley's *The Faro Table*, Hughes described an assault in his shop carried out by one of the personages Sedley (whom Hughes declared "was a fictitious person") had victimised in *A Winter in Dublin*.[21]

   The Private History is a "political-social satire in the 'secret history' or satirical *roman-à-clef* mode".[22] Under the cover of its fifteenth-century setting, the novel presents the reader with the secret history of contemporary celebrities. As its author declares, "anecdote is the principal subject of [her] work"[23] and, alongside the central plot, focused on the dissipated life of Edward IV and the unfortunate, rejected, Princess Bona, the novel features a crowded pantheon of high society figures. Undoubtedly, many parallels were so specific to the time that they are lost on the modern reader. The novel is replete with instances of depraved, cruel men and deceived, abused women who are often responsible for their own misfortunes. The episodes related are chiefly connected to the sex-lives of upper-class society, and are full of details that would have certainly been familiar to readers of gossip columns or 'paragraphs', as they were called at the time.

   The "Preface", starting from the immutability of human nature, sanctions the compari-

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[18] According to Jacqueline Belanger and Peter Garside, Honoria Scott "may or may not be a pseudonym for Susan Fraser" (J. BELANGER and P. GARSIDE, "The English Novel, 1800-1829: Update 4 (June 2003-August 2004)", *Cardiff Corvey; Reading the Romantic Text*, 12, Summer 2004, p. 113, http://sites.cardiff.ac.uk/romtextv2/files/2013/02/engnov4.pdf [last accessed on 31 August 2020]).

[19] P. GARSIDE, "J.F. Hughes and the Publication of Popular Fiction, 1803-1810", *The Library*, 6th ser., 9 (3), September 1987, p. 249. On season fictions see also, by the same author, "Popular Fiction and National Tale: Hidden Origins of Scott's *Waverley*", *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 46 (1), June 1991, pp. 30-53.

[20] W. SCOTT, "*Fatal Revenge; or, the Family of Montorio: a Romance*. By Dennis Jasper Murphy", *The Quarterly Review*, 3, May 1810, p. 341.

[21] See P. GARSIDE, "J.F. Hughes and the Publication of Popular Fiction", p. 250. For hypotheses regarding the identity of the prolific writer of scandal fictions who published under the pseudonym of Charles Sedley, see J. BELANGER and P. GARSIDE, "The English Novel, 1800-1829", pp. 104-109. The authors think that "the name most probably derives from the Restoration rake, Sir Charles Sedley (1639-1701)", and note how "Sedley was also commonly used as a name for licentious characters in contemporary fiction". Then, they concentrate on three possible contenders "for the dubious credit of authorship".

[22] L.M. WILSON, "British Women Writing Satirical Novels in the Romantic Period", p. 29.

[23] S. GREEN, *The Private History of the Court of England. In two Volumes*, London, J.G. Barnard, 1808, vol. I, p. 65. Page numbers given parenthetically for subsequent quotations from the novel refer to this edition.

son between the past and the present: "If princes and nobles in days of yore, were weary of their lawful and chaste wives, and wasted their patrimony and that of their people in the society of those women, who were some of them outcasts from polished society, do we not witness the same fatal propensities in succeeding reigns?" (vol. I, pp. x-xi). The concepts that "human nature is, in every age, the same" (vol. I, p. xiv) and that vice and depravity ruled sovereign in the fifteenth as in the nineteenth century are reiterated over and over, substantiating the author's satirical intent. Approaching the end of the narrative, for example, the reader is again reminded that "the above instances, which happened in the fifteenth century, are only mentioned to shew, that human nature is in every age the same. Little are the innovations in morals, since the wise Solomon advised us not to ask, 'Why were the former days better than these?'" (vol. II, p. 155). Then, in the "Conclusion", the writer restates her point and declares that "Both court and city were devoted as much to dissipation as they are at present" (vol. II, p. 246).

On occasions, virtuous examples among the nobility are apparently commended, but either the irony of the eulogium is soon discovered, or the favourable judgement is immediately reappraised. "Nobility" (ch. VII, vol. II), for instance, deals with vicious old aristocrats who corrupt youth, but opens with the following words of praise that, retrospectively, highlight the satirical intent of what follows:

Though vice and depravity of morals in a great measure predominated, yet England, nevertheless, could boast of many great and philanthropic characters: the foundation of several public charities, of the most laudable nature, were planned in this reign, and youth and unprotected innocence often found an asylum under the habitation, and the peculiar patronage of some of the virtuous nobility. (vol. II, p. 80)

Similarly, "Exalted Virtue" (ch. XVI, vol. II), which presents "Mary, a lady of the blood royal of Scotland" (p. 202) as a positive model of "feminine virtue", is followed by "Female Degradation", which features the corrupted Countess di Ladona (ch. XVII, vol. II).

However, when the contemporary celebrities portrayed in the narrative held key roles in politics and society, instead of being simply representatives of fashionable life, they are still recognisable to the modern reader. This is true for the actress and writer Mary Robinson, the first known mistress of the young Prince of Wales (afterwards George IV), who appears in the novel as Maria de Rosenvault. Maria is an accomplished player on the lute and singer, and a talented composer of poetry and songs. Just as the Prince was enraptured on seeing her acting as Perdita in David Garrick's adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, *Perdita and Florizel*, so Edward falls in love on seeing her playing in a pageant, "attired in the habit of a Danish Princess" (vol. I, p. 10). The name itself is similar, since Maria's maiden name is "Denbigh", while Mary Robinson's was "Darby". The name is revealing in the case of Mrs Ellinor Danjour too. She becomes the mistress of the Duke of Clarence, who is "first captivated […] at a public kind of theatre, where she appear[s] to peculiar advantage" (vol. I, p. 98). Danjour is a quasi-perfect anagram of the surname adopted by the actress Dorothea Jordan, the mistress of the Duke of Clarence (later William IV) who bore him ten children.[24]

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[24] The presence of the many theatrical celebrities who people the novel, which could seem anachronistic to the reader, is thus justified: "at this period of history we find no regular licenced theatres: yet places of public amusement were magnificently decorated, and, at their masques, pageants, and tournaments, no expence was spared to render them splendid" (vol. II, p. 146).

Other notorious princely mistresses who appear under cover in the novel are Mrs Maria Fitzherbert and Lady Jersey. Mrs Maria Fitzherbert was the twice-widowed Catholic the Prince of Wales secretly married in 1785, without the King's consent. This marriage was invalid under the 1772 Royal Marriages Act, which prescribed that no member of the royal family under twenty-five could marry without the King's consent. Had this marriage been valid, it would have excluded the Prince from the succession to the throne under the terms of the Act of Settlement of 1701, which decreed that no English monarch could hold the throne if married to a Catholic. In the novel, Edward's secret marriage to Elizabeth, a Lady "in her wane" widow to Sir John Grey, is presented as "a marriage, without witnesses, hurried over by an itinerant priest" (vol. I, p. 71). The author, however, is at pain to introduce the religious issue, and, in order to create a distinction in creed, she asserts that Lady Elizabeth is bigoted, superstitious and "at the Head of all the rigid Catholics", while Edward "favour[s] the creed of Wickliffe and his followers" (vol. I, p. 68).

A few pages later, we are told that "by a strange infatuation in a young and beautiful prince, Edward seemed possessed of a kind of mania for the charms of elderly ladies" (vol. I, p. 79). In fact, all the Prince of Wales's mistresses were older than he was. One of the most notorious was Lady Jersey (*née* Villiers), a grandmother in her forties and a mother of ten children. In the novel, she appears as Lady Conyers, "a lady who expected every day to become a grandmother; she was, indeed, older than the mother of Edward; and her youngest children were marriageable" (*ibidem*). The peculiarity of the Prince's sexual liaisons had, possibly, a part in making him the favourite target not only of verbal, but also of visual satire, as the countless caricatures published over the years show. Two of them – portraying the couple formed by Florizel and Perdita with Mary Robinson's cuckolded husband (Fig. 1), and Princess Caroline discovering her spouse's adulterous affair with Lady Jersey (Fig. 2) – are worth including as they bear witness to the amused irreverence that characterised such works.

The national hero Horatio Nelson, first Viscount Nelson, appears in Green's narrative as "the matchless" Lord Fauconberg,

Fig. 1: The Prince of Wales and Mary Robinson as Florizel and Perdita, broadside ballad dated 10 November 1780. © The Trustees of the British Museum, released as CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

The JERSEY Smuggler detected ; — or — Good cause for Separation. — Marriage vows, are false as Dicers oaths.

Fig. 2: The Princess of Wales discovering the Prince and Lady Jersey. James Gillray, hand-coloured etching, 24 May 1796. © The Trustees of the British Museum, released as CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

a hero, whose name was a terror to the French, both by sea and land; brave as a lion, indefatigable in the cause he served, he performed those achievements which would seem fabulous, if told as the prowess of ancient knights; yet this undaunted warrior was possessed of every amiable, every christian, virtue in private life. (vol. I, p. 58)

Admiral Nelson, however, was fatally shot in the course of the victorious battle of Trafalgar, whereas the "undaunted and successful hero" Lord Fauconberg, "whom no danger could intimidate, or numbers overawe", does not die at sea, but is killed at Tewkesbury. The blatant discrepancy is explained by the author in the following way: "our navy, then, did not approach, in any degree, to that zenith of glory it at present boasts; for though Lord Fauconberg frequently protected the sea, against the intrusions of our gallic neighbours, he was also often called into the field, during the combats of civil war" (vol. I, p. 192).

Another political personality who is presented under an extremely positive light is the former Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger, *alias* Lord Cobham, "a great and intrepid statesman, [who] has been aptly compared to a POLAR STAR, to guide the English to wealth and happiness" (vol. I, p. 59). Unfortunately, however, we are told that the foolish Edward "never appeared sufficiently grateful to *him*, or attached to *his* cause, to whom he owed his throne and life" (*ibidem*). Inexplicably, the Prince is "infatuated" with his "false friend" (vol. I, p. 60) Lovelace, "a man of noble family, eminent abilities, but of the loosest morals,

and most famed for the quantity of wine he could drink at a banquet" (vol. I, p. 55). In a chapter aptly titled "Mistaken Confidence", we are told that:

Lovelace was a disgrace, in some respects, to [the] noble family [of York], stimulated Edward to drink to excess, and led him into every haunt of vice; and he might, with truth, be said, by his ill example and precepts, at the time the princes were in their nonage, to have corrupted the morals of them all, and to have sown those seeds of vice in their minds, which promised no fruit of perfection in maturity. Indeed it seemed to be as much the delight of this thoughtless and inconsiderate man, to train the princes to every species of licentiousness, as a virtuous Spartan would feel in seeing his offspring become every thing great and good. (vol. I, p. 56)

Under the name of Lovelace, Green is depicting the leader of the radical Whigs, Charles James Fox. The connection becomes clear for the modern reader when Lovelace is defined as "THE MAN OF THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE" (vol. I, p. 61), a title Fox acquired after the July 1780 election. Lovelace is both "the avowed defender of the House of Lancaster"[25] and a friend of the heir of York (see vol. II, pp. 24-25), and, for the author, this is as paradoxical as the Prince of Wales's support of the foxite Whigs. Indeed, we are told that "both in his boyish days, and in maturer age, [the Lancastrians] were generally the chosen companions of him, who, from the house of York, was destined to fill the throne of England" (vol. II, pp. 140-41).

The concept is reiterated a few pages later and connected, this time, to another easily recognisable celebrity: the lexicographer James Knowles. He appears in the novel as Sir Thomas Knollys, the scholar who "carefully revised the English language, and brought it, in comparison to what it had heretofore been, to a state of purity and elegance" (vol. II, p. 148). As the reader is informed, "to the proper accentuation of words, we are entirely indebted to this master and reformer of the English tongue" (*ibidem*). The statement that Sir Thomas is "a great favourite of Edward's, and, like all his other favourites, attached to the cause of Lancaster" (vol. II, p. 147) is obviously absurd when read in its fifteenth-century context. It only makes sense if we think that, in this way, the author intends to chastise the Prince of Wales's closeness to those who did not vote with the King's government and supported, instead, the prerogatives of Parliament against the Crown's authority. According to Green, this is highly risky when the country is at war, since dissension at home inevitably helps the enemy. This danger becomes reality in the novel: "as the English were now at war with France, Louis, the eleventh of that name, who was of an intriguing and politic genius, took advantage of our dissensions at home, and gained over, by bribery and other stratagems, many of the Lancastrians to his party" (vol. I, p. 57). What happened in the fifteenth century is still a valuable lesson, since the English, again, are at war with France.

This is far from being the only instance in which the author explicitly engages with politics. In Volume I, we find a chapter that is titled "English Rebellion, and French Policy" and that, according to the footnotes, would be based on David Hume's *History of England* (see p. 121) and on "Rapin, Smollet, and others" (p. 131). This section relates the plan of the "French Machiavel" De Commines to debauch the English (who, however, are already depraved) to conquer them the better:

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[25] We are even told that, on Lovelace's death, "some papers [were] found in possession of the deceased, which proved how dearly he was attached to the interests of the house of Lancaster" (vol. II, pp. 30-31).

Knowing also, how the English had, of late, given themselves up to every species of expensive and luxurious pleasure, in which only they were excelled, in a very small degree, in France, he trusted that, by a sojournment in that depraved country, he might still improve that love of voluptuousness and public amusements, so as to dwindle the hardy English into effeminacy, and enervate them sufficiently to make them an easy conquest, whenever they should find their army sufficiently weakened by the slothful rust of peace. (vol. I, pp. 129-30)

Other chapters fully devoted to politics are "A Change of Ministry" (ch. XVIII, vol. I) and "The Dissolution of a Corrupt Parliament" (ch. VI, vol. II). In a thinly-veiled manner, they deal with the formation first, and then the dissolution of the Ministry of All the Talents, a broad coalition government that was formed following the death of William Pitt the Younger, in 1806, by the newly-appointed Prime Minister Baron William Grenville. The coalition included Charles James Fox and is described in the novel as composed of greedy and profligate men:

That virtuous parliament, which had stood for so long a time under Edward's excellent father, were now all out of place; which was filled up by men, who sought not the good of their country, like Cobham, but only how to fill their own coffers, give expensive entertainments, and lay the nation under fresh taxes and contributions to support their own unbounded extravagance. (vol. I, pp. 231-32)

After the collapse of the Ministry of All the Talents, Pitt's supporters returned to power, with the Tory William Cavendish-Bentinck, Duke of Portland, as Prime Minister. The event is thus commented upon in the narrative: "a dissolution of parliament soon followed, and a new ministry, firm friends to the interests of the house of York, were chosen in the place of those venal men, whose chief aim appeared to be directed to the erecting the house of Lancaster on the ruins of that of York" (vol. II, p. 79). Although politics, like satire, at the time was still considered a largely masculine discourse, Green appears really keen on discussing and passing judgement on political issues. When, in 1810, she published – anonymously – *The Reformist!!! A Serio-Comic Political Novel*, the critic for *The Monthly Review* could not believe "that the experience of a lady could have furnished all the scenes which [were] […] delineated", and claimed that he could not "attribute to a female pen the great illiberality which occasionally display[ed] itself" in the script.[26]

As already stated, at the core of *The Private History* we find Edward's rejection of the "sublime" Princess Bona. Actually, this event was extremely marginal to the life of the future Edward IV, and its centrality in the novel can only be explained when we understand that the two fictional characters are in fact figures for the Prince and Princess of Wales, whose matrimonial vicissitudes were notorious at the time. Alongside scandal fictions, in the years 1806-1810 Hughes published an equally topical body of "royal" titles that exploited, precisely, the public's quasi-morbid interest in the separation of the princely couple. Such an interest had reached a new intensity with the Delicate Investigation into the conduct of the Princess, an inquiry by four key members of the Whig administration set up in May 1806 and instigated by rumours concerning Princess Caroline's adoption of a three-month mysterious child: William Austin.

Public opinion firmly believed that Caroline had withheld from publication an account containing her version of the events. This view is also advanced in Green's novel, where we

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[26] Quoted in L.M. WILSON, "Women Writing Satirical Novels in the Romantic Period", p. 27. In the Preface to *The Reformist!!!*, however, the author "honestly confessed" that "politics [was] not [her] *forté*" (*ibidem*, p. 32).

find an explicit reference to an alleged vindication, whose suppression is imputed to a conspiracy: "this cruel calumny having reached her ears, she submitted to an impartial public a defence, which, from party intrigues, we are sorry to say, is irrecoverably lost: for Edward, aided by his female mentor, entirely suppressed its publication" (vol. I, p. 250). However, Hughes's publications promptly filled this editorial gap. *The Royal Investigation, or Vindication of the Princess of Wales*, published in 1807, wanted to offer an account of "[Caroline's] Acquittal on twenty-four supposed charges" and "a complete refutation of all the calumnies circulated to her prejudice". In the same year, *The Royal Eclipse; or, Delicate Facts Exhibiting the Secret Memoirs of Squire George and His Wife*, by the pseudonymous Diogenes, came again from Hughes's press and was bitterly criticised by the *Critical Review*:

The late allusions to delicate facts and delicate enquiries, whether in the discussions of newspapers, or in the more diffuse and elaborate nonsense of satirical romances, are all impositions on public credulity. For the true state of the question is a secret; and it seems to be the opinion of a great personage, and a committee of his privy council, that it should remain a secret.
   As long as it does not involve any consideration affecting the succession, the public have no concern in the business, but as it may sympathize with the private felicity of the heir to the throne.[27]

Again in 1807, one of Sedley's novels, *The Infidel Mother: or, Three Winters in London*, was devoted to the subject. This is the newspaper advertisement for the second edition, which was published in the same year:

MR. HUGHES has the honour of announcing the Second Edition of this singularly interesting Work: it embraces correct details of fashionable life in all its varied forms, and rescues from undeserved obloquy an Illustrious Personage, who silently smarts under the noble sacrifice of truth and delicacy; and completely develops a certain delicate mystery that has so long agitated the fashionable world.[28]

In 1808, besides *The Private History of the Court of England*, a good number of royal titles saw the light of day: J.P. Hurstone's *Royal Intrigues: or, Secret Memoirs of Four Princesses*; the anonymous historical novel *The Royal Legend. A Tale*, which used as a cover the profligate youth of the future Henry V, and the equally anonymous *The Royal Stranger. A Tale*, where the protagonist is thus introduced: "The Stranger was possessed of every accomplishment which could draw admiration and love from mankind".[29] Actually, when the reviewers attacked *The Private History*, it was this conspicuous and popular body of scandal fiction they wanted to indict. The critic for the *Monthly Review* declared:

Those who attend to the lighter productions of the press cannot fail to have observed the mischievous taste for libels on individuals, which has for a long time prevailed; gratifying at once the too general love of indiscriminate detraction, and the vulgar thirst after fashionable anecdote, by the mixture of a small portion of truth with a great share of falsehood and malignity.[30]

The Critical Review was likewise categorical in condemning the genre:

It is a sign of great depravity of manners when such books as that before us are encouraged and multiply. The court of France (the most dissolute in the universe) has abounded with them in her

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[27] *The Critical Review, or, Annals of Literature*, 3rd ser., 11, August 1807, pp. 428-29.
[28] *The Morning Chronicle*, Saturday, 6 June 1807.
[29] Anonymous, *The R___l Stranger. A Tale*, London, J.F. Hughes, 1808, p. 3.
[30] *The Monthly Review; Or Literary Journal, Enlarged*, 58, January 1809, p. 101.

most dissolute periods; and the court of England under Charles the second followed the example. We have been tolerably free from similar pests during the reigns of the Brunswicks, till within the last few years, when the very weak and unguarded conduct of some persons of the highest rank in the country has opened again the floodgates of scandal.[31]

Lord Byron was similarly convinced of the detrimental nature of this kind of fiction, as the letter he wrote on 14 December 1813 to Thomas Ashe, the author of one of the titles I will mention next, shows:

Whatever may be your situation, I cannot but commend your resolution to abjure and abandon the publication and composition of works such as those to which you have alluded. Depend upon it, they amuse *few*, disgrace both *reader* and *writer*, and benefit none. It will be my wish to assist you, as far as my limited means will admit, to break such a bondage.[32]

The vogue for the royal titles, however, was to continue in the following years. John Agg's *The Royal Sufferer; or, Intrigues at the Close of the Eighteenth Century. A Fashionable Novel. Interspersed with Anecdotes, Connected with the British Court* was published in 1810, and Thomas Ashe's *The Spirit of "The Book"; or, Memoirs of Caroline, Princess of Hasburgh, a Political and Amatory Romance* came out in 1811. The latter work was still advertised referring the prospective reader to the allegedly suppressed "Book": "this interesting work embraces the subject matter of the extraordinary and momentous suppressed Book, known by the name of the 'Delicate Investigation' and comprehends Memoirs of many of the now distinguished and illustrious personages of the age".[33] *The Royal Sufferer* was reissued in 1813 as *The Secret Memoirs of an Illustrious Princess; or, The Royal Sufferer*. This was a crucial year because the findings of the Delicate Investigation were finally made public, and published with the following, hyper-detailed, title: *The Genuine Book. An Inquiry, or, Delicate Investigation, into the Conduct of Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales, Before Lords Erskine, Spencer, Grenville, and Ellenborough, the Four Special Commissioners of Inquiry, Appointed by His Majesty in the Year 1806. Reprinted from an Authentic Copy, Superintended through the Press by the Right Hon. Spencer Perceval*. Its "Advertisement" read:

So many and so various have been the impositions on public credulity with regard to "The Book" that it has been deemed advisable to resort to an infallible proof of the authenticity of the following pages, and place beyond a question the fact of the whole being a correct copy of the original suppressed "Book" prepared for publication by the late Mr. Perceval.[34]

The Genuine Book had been preceded by the publication of a letter – dated 14 January 1813 – that Caroline had written to her husband. The missive was reported in full by *The Morning Chronicle* on 10 February, and then re-published in most British newspapers. As

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[31] *The Critical Review, or, Annals of Literature*, 3rd ser., 14, June 1808, p. 217.

[32] T. MORE (ed.), *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron: With Notices of His Life*, 2 vols, London, John Murray, 1830, vol. I, p. 493.

[33] *The Morning Chronicle*, Tuesday, 30 July 1811. A previous advertisement claimed that the work was "*formed upon the basis* of the suppressed 'Book'" (*The Star*, Monday, 27 May 1810; emphasis added). In his *Memoirs*, Cyrus Redding claimed that Ashe "wrote false memoirs of living people, to get paid for their suppression" (C. REDDING, *Fifty Years' Recollections*, 3 vols, London, Skeet, 1858, vol. III, p. 67).

[34] S. PERCEVAL, *The Genuine Book. An Inquiry, or, Delicate Investigation, into the Conduct of Her Royal Highness The Princess of Wales, [...] Second edition*, London, R. Edwards, 1813, p. i.

Jane Robins puts it, "it caused a furore"[35] and further increased popular support for Caroline. A few days later, Jane Austen wrote in a letter to a friend: "I suppose all the world is sitting in judgement upon the Princess of Wales's letter. Poor woman, I shall support her as long as I can".[36] Among the Princess's new fans we find *The Times*, which after its declaration for Caroline saw its sales shot up.

The obsession with the royal marriage reached its climax in 1820, with George's desperate (and pathetic) attempts to divorce his wife to prevent her from being crowned Queen. As the only legal grounds for divorce were adultery, the King requested that Parliament might dissolve the marriage and deprive Caroline of the title of Queen, citing her alleged infidelity with Bartolomeo Pergami when travelling on the continent. Even during what took the appearance of a state trial, Caroline remained immensely popular.[37] Actually, she was seen as the representative of "the people". She appealed to republicans, radicals and reformers alike, and was paradoxically transformed into the symbol of opposition to the unpopular monarch and his government.[38] Predictably, two new royal-title novels were published in 1820, both by Edward Barron: *The Royal Wanderer, or Secret Memoirs of Caroline* and *The Wrongs of Royalty; Being, a Continuation of The Royal Wanderer, or, Memoirs of Her Present Majesty Queen Caroline*.[39]

Going back to the *à clef* defence of Princess Caroline in *The Private History*, Bona of Savoy is unvaryingly presented as a paramount of beauty and an epitome of virtue. She is first introduced as "a princess then in the bloom of early youth, lovely in her person, matchless in virtue, and possessed of every elegant acquirement" (vol. I, p. 66). The eulogy is reiterated in very similar terms later on: "the Princess of Savoy [was] adorned with all that youth, innocence, blooming health, and innate modesty could combine to make her lovely and alluring among women" (vol. I, pp. 160-61), and again in the "Conclusion", where her victory over calumny is celebrated: "the fame of the virtuous and accomplished Princess of Savoy rose more resplendent, in snowy whiteness, since the insidious attacks of her calumniators" (vol. II, p. 246). Contrariwise, the author's judgement of Edward is extremely harsh. He is repeatedly accused of dissipation, lasciviousness, gambling and drunkenness. The episodes relating his depravity abound, and his profligate conduct is time and again remarked upon: "[Edward] gave way to the natural bent of his mind—the love of pleasure; and again wooed dissipation in every form" (vol. I, pp. 247-48). Edward's mistress is not spared, and is made the target of offensive jests that, exploiting a self-defensive strategy authorised by the *à clef* mode, are imputed to the barbarity of the times (see vol. I, pp. 248-49). The people hope that the marriage with Bona will reform Edward (see vol. I, p. 113), and we are told that the prince at first "evinced no aversion to this match, but shewed rather a more than ready acquiescence to it". To this, the author adds: "what

[35] J. ROBINS, *The Trial of Queen Caroline: The Scandalous Affair that Nearly Ended a Monarchy*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 2006, p. 41.

[36] Quoted *ibidem*, p. 42.

[37] For a curious episode at Drury Lane bearing witness to Caroline's popularity with radicals, see *ibidem*, p. 97.

[38] On Caroline's popularity in 1820, see *ibidem*, p. 94 and *passim*.

[39] In 1815, a novel with a similar title written by the pseudonymous Algernon had been published: *The Royal Wanderer, or the Exile of England*. However, as the *Critical Review* observed, the adventures related were mostly invented, and only slightly connected to "the heroine, whose misfortunes have ever been regarded with compassion by the British nation" (*The Critical Review, or, Annals of Literature*, 3th ser., 2, Dec 1815, p. 652). As should be evident by now, scandal fiction thrived on similarity in titles.

could be his motive for this duplicity, posterity has yet to learn" (vol. I, p. 66). This indeed appears a disingenuous move on her part, since the reasons for the Prince of Wales's initial acceptance of the marriage were well known to public opinion, as were the reasons for his subsequent rejection. The judgement the author officially passes on the Prince is that of impulsiveness, but she explicitly says that she is minimising: "the ungrateful conduct of the prince is sincerely to be deplored; and the mind naturally perceives how dangerous and imprudent, not to give them an harsher term, were the steps which he took in binding himself to Lady Elizabeth Grey" (vol. I, p. 78).

However, apart from such similarities in characterisation and situation, as the novel proceeds, numerous precise parallels that refer the reader directly to the Delicate Investigation can be found. Princess Bona is presented as "a deserted mistress, a bride affianced and neglected, [whom] no other prince could seek […] in marriage" (vol. I, p. 249), and this only makes sense in view of the fact that, after the separation, the Princess of Wales was not permitted to have an amorous liaison under penalty of death. Like Caroline, Bona after being abandoned is unjustly attacked – "the most virtuous of her sex was stigmatized with the character of a female libertine" (vol. I, p. 250) – and public opinion turns against Edward for his contemptuous neglect of the Princess (see vol. I, pp. 204 and 251).

The second volume opens with an "Injured Princess" who, "in an almost total exclusion from society, [weeps] in solitude, over her misfortunes" (pp. 1-2). Just like Caroline, who was "refused the basic standards of a common court", was not "given the chance to appear before the enquiry and defend herself", and "had no chance of an appeal, as the report's findings were devoid of any legal framework",[40] Princess Bona has "the mortification of seeing a public testimony of her worth denied to her" (p. 1). William Austin, the three-month child that Caroline took with her after her separation from the Prince and was the starting point for the Investigation, finds a parallel in the "beautiful infant in [the] neighbourhood" who, "during [the] voluntary seclusion" of Princess Bona, becomes an orphan and is "brought home to her, nursed, and reared at her expence". This circumstance "giv[es] fresh licence to the unhallowed tongues of her enemies" – credited by Edward – who allege that the child is the "illicit offspring" she had by her presumed lover (p. 4).

All historical cover is then abandoned when we are told that "a chosen committee [is] appointed to investigate the conduct of the princess" (p. 4). Before relating, in a chapter that is unsurprisingly titled "The Investigation" (ch. II), the *proceedings* of "the most ridiculous and absurd investigation of the Princess Bona's conduct" – which consists in "the domestic examination of the different portioning out her time in the interior of her household concerns" (p. 4) – the *results* of the enquiry are anticipated. The committee evidences

by every corroborating circumstance, in the most strict inquiry of the disposal of her time, how deeply she ha[s] been injured in her heretofore fair reputation. Her every leisure moment [is] proved to have been devoted to study, and to the practice of those accomplishments she ha[s], in her early youth, been taught; in planning schemes to promote public charities, and in an universal series of acts of beneficence towards worthy individuals (pp. 4-5).

This, of course, is a biased account, since it was well known that Caroline's lifestyle, after the separation, had not been irreproachable. In support of her assertions, however, the author goes so far as to give what is presented as the "remarks" of "a writer of those times

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[40] J. ROBINS, *The Trial of Queen Caroline*, p. 33.

[…] in his own words" (p. 5), but is actually an invented insert, as the clumsiness of the pseudo-fifteenth-century language proves.

Afterwards, a scandal reported by all the major London newspapers is introduced: in May 1796, a letter written by the Princess to her family was intercepted by the Prince's mistress, Lady Jersey. The letter included rude comments about the royal family and, in particular, about Queen Charlotte, who was called "Old Snuffy". The newspapers, however, were incensed at such an infringement of privacy, and rushed to support Caroline.[41] In the novel, the circumstance, which is presented as an event occurred during a past visit of Princess Bona to England, is thus related:

[The innocent girl] wrote to an intimate friend every thought, as it presented itself to her lively imagination. The chief subject of this sprightly letter treated of her reception at the English court. The person of her future mother-in-law underwent something of a caricature description; yet so strikingly like the original, that it could not be mistaken, The perfidious Lady Conyers got hold of this fatal letter, and gave it into the hands of her for whom this picture, so far from a flattering one, was designed. The offence was of too flagrant a nature to be pardoned; […] Still the exalted conduct of the amiable Bona gained her the love and veneration of the whole kingdom, and its discerning majority saw how deeply she was injured. (pp. 8-10)

As far as the Investigation itself is concerned, Princess Caroline's main accusers, the Douglases, feature in the novel under an extremely thin disguise as "Sir Douglas Malcolm and his lady" (p. 14). The only defensive strategy the author adopts when presenting the couple is referring the reader, in a footnote, to "Rapin, Hume, & c." (p. 15). Sir Douglas is straightforwardly presented as a traitor. He is a coward, and acts out of offended pride and resentment. His Lady is similarly described in far from flattering terms. The couple became, indeed, a favourite target of satire, as can be seen from a 1813 cartoon that followed the publication of the results of the "Delicate Investigation", and showed Sir John and Lady Douglas being led to a pillory erected outside Montagu House, Blackheath (the residence of the Princess of Wales), after their evidence against the Princess had been discredited (Fig. 3).

As regards the woman's role in the Investigation, in the novel we are told that "no scheme or artifice was left untried, which might add to the slander already thrown on [the Princess's] character. Her tongue made use of the most virulent calumny and invective against her; alledging, that she, who had been her bosom friend and confidante, could vouch for the truth of all she said" (p. 18). Just like in the actual enquiry, the interrogation of the servants "who were placed as spies on [the Princess's] conduct" (p. 20) is made central. We are told that, "separately interrogated" (p. 19), they found "her demeanor so correct, her conversation so pure, that they adored, and joyfully cleared by their testimony, a character, the most ennobled, the most virtuous, that had ever condescended to ally itself to the throne of Great Britain" (pp. 20-21). As a matter of fact, the testimony given by Princess Caroline's servants was ambiguous, since they said that she had been flirtatious, though they did not offer any proof of an affair.

Green's unremitting defence of the Princess is sealed in Chapter VIII, where we find "A Letter" allegedly written by Blanche of Bretagne, a relation of the Princess of Savoy, which is a long expostulation in favour of Princess Caroline, formulated as an impassioned

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[41] See *ibidem*, pp. 20-21.

Fig. 3: Sir John and Lady Douglas being led to the pillory, hand-coloured etching, 1 April 1813, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Anticipations_for_the_Pillory.jpg#globalusage; https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/legalcode

plea to present a defence. In this "exhortation to the princess to render her cause public" (p. 89), all disguise is again thrown away, and, as the following brief excerpt shows, the script results utterly incoherent if applied to Princess Bona: "It is due to the future QUEEN OF ENGLAND, that she be restored, at least, to those public honours, which, (by that title) and her just prerogative, through intrigue and cruelty, have denied her those private rights which, her relative situation and individual merit entirely command" (vol. II, p. 92). In the "Conclusion", the author declares that this twenty-page insert that bears witness to "female friendship and virtue" was written by a "literary friend" (p. 252).

   Although the historical setting is chiefly an excuse to deal with topical issues, and anachronistic inconsistencies abound,[42] *The Private History* interestingly shares numerous

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[42] The most evident anachronisms are connected with religion and with the author's anti-French sentiments. The novel counts many anti-Catholic tirades. For instance, we are told that, at the time, "more than half of the civilized world, were sunk in popish superstition" (vol. II, p. 233). This is obviously anachronistic, since *all* the civilised world was Catholic in the fifteenth century. Equally absurd is transforming all the positive characters in "disciples of Wyckliffe" or Reformed militants (see vol. I, pp. 68 and 241 and vol. II, p. 61). Anachronistic is also the treatment of Louis XI, who is presented in terms that are reminiscent of contemporary British descriptions of Napoleon: "the arbitrary and tyrannical ruler of France, was rapidly extending his territories, and acquiring, by treachery, plunder, and cruelty, an immensity of riches" (vol. II, p. 231). In the same chapter (titled "Prophecies"), the French king is even identified with the Antichrist through numerological evidence based on the *Book of Revelation* (see vol. II, pp. 236-40).

features with the newly formed historical novel, which the author exploits with a considerable degree of self-awareness. Green uses paratextual devices, such as the preface and footnotes, which historical novelists copied from antiquarian publications. The footnotes in particular, directing the readers to respected works of history, displayed the authors' learning and lent the appearance of authority to what was a popular fictional genre. Actually, in these formative years, the historical novel "aim[ed] to raise its status in the generic hierarchy, appealing to a higher class of readers by associating itself with historical and antiquarian publications".[43] In *The Private History*, however, the reference to valued historical texts, like Hume's *History of England*,[44] is often a stratagem either to mask dangerous contents or to support a partisan argument.

In the novel, we also find the same sceptical, doubting attitude that antiquarians manifested towards documents and historical generalisations, and found its way into fictions like Sophia Lee's immensely successful *The Recess, or, A Tale of Other Times* (1783-85).[45] This is already made explicit in the *incipit*, where the unreliability of historical accounts is asserted, and the authority of history is questioned:

In treating of ages long gone by, the pen, while it endeavours to be faithful to truth, should be ever impartial. The historic page is too frequently clouded with error; and though some facts are conspicuous to conviction, by agreeing authors, or well preserved manuscripts, all the events we read of are not to be too implicitly credited. (vol. I, p. 1)

The "offended monkish writer" mentioned at the close of Volume I (p. 261) stands for the prejudiced and partial historiographer the reader of history should distrust. In addition to such a scepticism about the *truth* of historical accounts, it is their *adequacy* to interpret reality that is utterly questioned. According to Green, historical records do not catch the real essence of things because they only look at the surface: "it is strange that historians, like some ill judges of painting, look only on the lustre of false colouring which appears on the surface, and examine not closely into the intrinsic worth of the piece" (vol. I, p. 70). In spite of such an avowed sceptical attitude, the author ambiguously insists that her account is founded on history,[46] and refers the reader to historical works in the footnotes. As already hinted at, this amounts to a strategy of self-defence, and the circumstance that, on occasions, she unabashedly changes history to support her point – as in the case of her anti-French argument, for example – confirms such an impression. Green shrewdly declares that she is interested in anecdote, and in so doing she asserts her right to introduce anachronisms, if they serve her purpose:

As anecdote is the principal subject of this work, it is to be hoped that a trifling anachronism, to accomplish that design, will be forgiven; and if, in the course of this history, we may be sometimes obliged to refer back to some peculiar circumstances, which happened in this eventful reign, criticism will not, we trust, assail us with severity. We are not writing a chronological history of England; and though the mention of wars and politics must, of course, be slightly touched upon, yet the domestic scenes of the court and nation form the chief plan of these volumes. (vol. I, p. 65)

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[43] A.H. STEVENS, *British Historical Fiction before Scott*, p. 98.
[44] See vol. I, p. 121, and vol. II, pp. 77 and 78.
[45] On Lee's use of history in *The Recess*, see A.H. STEVENS, *British Historical Fiction before Scott*, pp. 40-47.
[46] She writes, for example, "we are assured, from respectable historians, that…" (vol. I, p. 76).

In the quotation above, we find the novelists' usual habit of anticipating the reviewers' accusations that, as we have already appreciated, could be very harsh.[47]

Although reviewers almost unanimously condemned *The Private History*, chiefly because scandal-mongering secret histories were considered as "the very lowest form of satire: the personal (and potentially libellous) attack",[48] Green was proud of what appears to have been her first novel. Following a convention that characterised satirical novels and was to continue well into the 1830s, the book was published anonymously.[49] However, all her subsequent titles, either satirical or non-satirical, were advertised as "by the author of *The Private History of the Court of England*", and in later works, the indication "by Mrs Green" preceded the statement. The "Preface" to her best-known novel, *Romance Readers and Romance Writers: A Satirical Novel* (1810), reports:

The following volumes are avowed to be written by the author of "The Private History of the Court of England!" Various conjectures having arisen as to the writer of that work, the Author, who has reasons for yet concealing her name, will affix the real initials of that name to this advertisement. Her merits, as a writer, are small; the mercy, the forbearance of a British Public, ample; to such she looks up for support and protection.[50]

Here, Green appears as the proud author of what she nevertheless deems a risky kind of narrative. But why did she glory in avowing authorship of a work that reviewers saw as a product of the worst trend of contemporary novel writing? All the more given the fact that uncovering fashionable scandals was dangerous, since libel suits were a real possibility? This incongruence is explained when we realise that Green, actually, did not see herself as a despicable scandal-mongerer, but as that moral satirist who, in scourging vice and promoting virtue, had always held a crucial role in any society. The abundance of edifying observations gives evidence of such an intention, and the explicit warning expressed in the "Preface" leaves no room for doubt: "Ye, who find the likeness of this picture stop, while time puts it in your power!" (vol. I, p. xii). The chapter mottoes, which comment upon the narrative through quotations from familiar authors, likewise absolve a moralising function.

In approaching the author's chosen role as a moral satirist, we must again deal with paradoxes. Taking as a premise the unchanging quality of human nature, she nevertheless encourages a moral reformation. Similarly, whereas the continuous comparisons between past and present would imply a view of history as essentially static ("there is nothing new under the sun", we are told),[51] she nonetheless advocates social improvement. The key to the solution of these contradictions lies, this time, in her belief in the interconnectedness of the private and the public spheres. A reformation of morals within the private arena can open a space for change in society at large, especially so when leading figures are concerned. As Price notes, "Green's work illuminates a developing reformist strand of conservatism. Although wholesale social change might have seemed undesirable to conservative loyalists, cautious moralists like Jane West, Elizabeth Hamilton and Sarah Green increasingly emphasized the need for the reformation of the upper ranks".[52] Royals, more than

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[47] See A.H. STEVENS, *British Historical Fiction before Scott*, pp. 142-44.
[48] L.M. WILSON, "Women Writing Satirical Novels in the Romantic Period", p. 30.
[49] See *ibidem*, p. 26.
[50] Quoted *ibidem*, p. 30.
[51] Vol. I, p. 144.
[52] S. GREEN, *The Private History of the Court of England*, ed. F. PRICE, p. xiv.

anyone, should set an example to their people: "what must a nation look for amongst the manners and morals of a people, when those of their prince are so vitiated?" (vol. I, p. 80). In the novel, we are shown how Edward's "rooted aversion" (vol. I, p. 179) to the Princess of Savoy leads to political turmoil, and the comment the author affixes cannot but signify, out of allegory, that the Prince of Wales's lack of discrimination in sexual affairs calls into question his judgement on national matters and puts the country in danger: "how often thus do we see private iniquities, and the profanation of sacred vows, bring on an increase of national calamities!" (vol. I, p. 183). Her task as a moral satirist would be to bring the Prince to his senses and show him his responsibilities as future head of the nation.

Another field where Green sees progress as possible and necessary, and where she endeavours, through her novel, to give a contribution, is the feminine condition. While reaffirming her vow to impartiality, she vehemently posits herself as the professed protector of her sex: "to a sex, subject to many oppressions, the author of this work has endeavoured to shew every possible protection. Yet, never let the reader imagine, that a blind or mistaken partiality can ever guide a pen, devoted to the cause of candour, and a fair investigation of the manners of the age it treats of" (vol. II, p. 217). Actually, though the narrative is overflowing with gender clichés, the sexual double standard is passionately exposed and condemned: "we affect to abjure Turkish principles, but in fact we cherish them; and, whatever freedom is pretended to be accorded to woman, she is yet amenable, in the severest degree, to those laws, which man, who formed them, daily and hourly transgresses" (vol. II, p. 119). The victims of such a despicable system (the "deluded female[s]") are unvaryingly treated with sympathy in the novel. It is men who misuse women who are responsible for their fall, we are told (see vol. II, pp. 134 and 153). Thus, it is men more generally, and not just the aristocrats, who need to reform their behaviour. Even more, (limited) rights for women are overtly requested, and are deemed a priority in the political agenda:

The arbitrary laws above-cited, are not peculiar to the fifteenth century; they still hold unlimited sway. The generous Colonel H*****, had it in contemplation, if he ever obtained a place in the English senate, to propose an amelioration of our laws, as far as they related, to use his own words, "to weak and oppressed woman." Why does not some liberal-minded senator, in a land that triumphs in its freedom, step forward and obtain for them a small portion of those rights, which reasonable beings demand, and which tyrant man usurps, and appropriates solely to himself? (vol. II, pp. 120-21)

Indeed, apart from its gossiping content, Green's novel is a complex work, and could have appealed to contemporary readers in a number of ways. For example, in the story of the beautiful Elfrida, furtively raised by the Duchess of York and then entrusted to a convent, which concludes Volume I, we find the same fascination with secret royal offspring and the same gusto in filling the gaps of history that characterised, again, Lee's novel and had given rise to many "alternative or supplementary 'histories'".[53] In fact, in Volume II it is revealed that Elfrida is the fruit of the doomed love between a fictional sister of Edward IV ("a younger female branch of the house of York", p. 159) and the Lancaster heir, Edward. Unfortunately, as we are told in the conclusion of "A Mystery Elucidated", of "the fate and fortune of this offspring of the youthful branches of the opposite parties, history has left us yet in the dark" (p. 189). History is incomplete, and thus it is the novelist's duty to supplement it.

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[53] I. FERRIS, "Historical Romance", in P. GARSIDE and K. O'BRIEN (eds), *The Oxford History of the Novel in English. Volume II*, p. 303.

The Private History of the Court of England was severely censured by reviewers at the time of its publication and is much neglected in contemporary criticism. Still, as this article has argued, in spite of the challenges it undeniably poses to the modern reader, this novel is highly significant as a social and literary product of the pre-Regency years. Using history as a veil for present-day scandal, its author ingeniously fused two novelistic trends contemporary readers adored, and such an operation makes the book representative of its culturally and politically eventful times.

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Paolo Bugliani

A Family Affair:
Michel de Montaigne Meets William Hazlitt & Son

Abstract: This paper aims at illuminating a very interesting cultural-mediation case that involved Romantic essayist William Hazlitt and his son, also named William. The linking point was constituted by Michel de Montaigne's *Essais*, which, for William Hazlitt Sr., had represented a source of inspiration to fashion his own kind of modern essay. Hazlitt Jr., on his part, committed himself to editing a volume of Montaigne's *Complete Works*, where he managed to provide a nuanced profile of the French author to an audience who had already become familiar with him via his father. Such an example was to have many followers and imitators.

Keywords: William Hazlitt. Cultural Translation. Michel de Montaigne. *Essais* in England.

> A child is sleeping:
> An old man gone.
> O, father forsaken,
> Forgive your son!
> J. Joyce, "Ecce Puer"

1. Introduction

William Hazlitt, a prolific essayist,[1] a belligerent commentator of his contemporary society, and an aspirant grammarian[2] and metaphysician,[3] was indeed one of the most remarkable prose-writers in modern English literature. In later years, his contribution to Romanticism has been re-evaluated and put at the very core of the Romantic movement itself, as underlined by critic and academic Duncan Wu:

Romanticism is where the modern age begins, and Hazlitt was its most articulate spokesman. No one else had the ability to see it whole; no one else knew so many of its politicians, poets, and philosophers. By interpreting it for his contemporaries, he speaks to us of ourselves – of the culture and world we now inhabit. Perhaps the most important development of his time, the creation of a mass media, is one that now dominates our lives. Hazlitt's livelihood was dependent on it. […] he took political sketch-writing to a new level, invented sports commentary as we know it, and created the essay form as practiced by Clive James, Gore Vidal, and Michael Foot.[4]

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[1]   See U. Natarajan, "The Veil of Familiarity: Romantic Philosophy and the Familiar Essay", *Studies in Romanticism*, 42 (1), 2003, pp. 27-44; T. Milnes, "Romantic Essayism", in Id., *The Testimony of Sense: Empiricism and the Essay from Hume to Hazlitt*, Oxford, OUP, 2019, pp. 192-254.

[2]   See M. Tomalin, *Romanticism and Linguistic Theory: William Hazlitt, Language and Literature*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

[3]   See U. Natarajan, T. Paulin and D. Wu (eds), *Metaphysical Hazlitt: Bicentenary Essays*, London and New York, Routledge, 2005.

[4]   D. Wu, *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man*, Oxford, OUP, 2008, p. xxii.

Wu's portrayal is very accurate and pinpoints a crucial feature of Hazlitt's centrality to modern literary tradition, i.e., his ability to gain recognition and fame through a clever use of the nonfiction medium. If the idea of Hazlitt 'creating' the modern essay is debatable – suffice it mention a pivotal figure like Charles Lamb – Wu's argument can be adopted and fruitfully reframed in a 'genealogical' sense. That is to say, if we take Montaigne and his fortune in England as a standpoint,[5] then the ability to 'remediate' for modern times the form that the French jurist had fathered in Bordeaux at the end of the seventeenth century can in fact be seen as a sort of 'second creation'. And, indeed, William Hazlitt played a large and relatively unexplored role in the dissemination of the *Montaignesque* essay in England, so that he, along with his son, can be considered as 'cultural translators' worthy of a detailed study.

The figure of the cultural translator has been recently investigated by Diego Saglia in relation to the circulation of Italian literary heritage in early nineteenth-century Britain, thanks to the contribution of continental mediators such as celebrated Simonde de Sismondi.[6] Hazlitt's ascription of some renowned English literary authors (like Geoffrey Chaucer and Edmund Spenser) to an Italian 'school' might have had political reasons,[7] but it is nevertheless the sign of an attempt to redraw those "networks of cultural interrelations and notions about the national literature"[8] that had Madame de Staël's Coppet salon at its core. The aim of this paper is therefore to follow Hazlitt's engagement with one of France's most influential authors, Michel de Montaigne, and also evaluate the long-lasting influence of his own critical appraisal on his son's 1842 edition of Montaigne's works.

A study of this kind is also to shed light on the reception of an author who had had a close relationship with English literature. The context of the Hazlitts' 'joint Englishing' of Montaigne deserves attention because it led to the first complete English edition and played a crucial role in the delineation of an English Montaigne who was not only co-existent with the French one, but also, "if anything, stronger".[9] Occurring in a period which saw the strengthening of a nationalistic ideal of literature, this joint operation of cultural translation offers a fresh insight into matters of textual and literary criticism, as well as into an evolution of Anglo-French cultural relations that would continue throughout the Victorian Age and among a circle of "politically sophisticated members of British society".[10]

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[5] See W.M. Hamlin, *Montaigne's English Journey: Reading the* Essays *in Shakespeare's Day*, Oxford, OUP, 2013.

[6] See D. Saglia, *European Literatures in Britain, 1815-1832: Romantic Translations*, Cambridge, CUP, 2019, pp. 45-46.

[7] The undertone of Hazlitt's "Lectures" seems to be profoundly pro-European in nature. The "radical historicised view of Dante" (W. Bowers, *The Italian Idea: Anglo-Italian Radical Literary Culture, 1815-1823*, Cambridge, CUP, 2020, p. 69) that Hazlitt had proposed three years before to the readers of the *Edinburgh Review* was harshly criticised by the acerbic conservative stance of *Blackwood's*, since it sought to present the Italian poet as a common source of modern poetry. This politicised aesthetic project is clearly addressed by Saglia and other staple studies mainly concerned with the socio-political implications of Anglo-Italian cultural relations. See, among the most relevant with regard to Hazlitt: J. Cox, *Romanticism in the Shadow of War: Literary Culture in the Napoleonic War Years*, Cambridge, CUP, 2014, and J. Stabler, *The Artistry of Exile: Romantic and Victorian Writers in Italy*, Oxford, OUP, 2013.

[8] W. Bowers, *The Italian Idea: Anglo-Italian Radical Literary Culture, 1815-1823*, p. 46.

[9] W. Boutcher, "Montaigne in England and America", in P. Desan (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Montaigne*, Oxford, OUP, 2016, p. 326.

[10] G. Varouxakis, *Victorian Political Thought on France and the French*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, p. 1. In particular, see pp. 103-30 for William Hazlitt's influence on this late nineteenth-century political outcome of the issue.

2. *William Hazlitt (1778-1830)*

In order to assess the translation work by William Hazlitt Jr., we must briefly dwell on his father's pronouncements on Montaigne, which, although not copious, are indeed fundamental to understand the extent to which the essay *à la Montaigne* he promoted would leave an imprint on his son's mind and future choices.

The Round Table (1817), Hazlitt's first collection (written in collaboration with Leigh Hunt), features an essay about *The Tatler*, one of the most influential periodical publications of the preceding century. In "On the Tatler", Hazlitt singles out Montaigne as the initiator of a kind of familiar and yet idiosyncratic "personal authorship",[11] which is said to develop out of a more general "magnanimous and undisguised" egotism, this being almost unanimously recognised as a constitutive ingredient of personal essayism:[12]

Of all periodical essayists (our ingenious predecessors), the Tatler has always appeared to us the most accomplished and agreeable. Montaigne, who was the father of this kind of personal authorship among the moderns, in which the reader is admitted behind the curtain, and sits down with the writer in his gown and slippers, was a most magnanimous and undisguised egotist; but Isaac Bickerstaff, Esq. was the more disinterested gossip of the two. The French author is contented to describe the peculiarities of his own mind and person, which he does with a most copious and unsparing hand. The English journalist, goodnaturedly, lets you into the secret both of his own affairs and those of his neighbours.[13]

Hazlitt's second pronouncement occurred within a notably remarkable frame, that of his successful public lectures at the Surrey Institution, namely in the midst of the fifth talk in the English Comic Writers series, entitled "On the Periodical Essayists". Here Hazlitt builds on the premises of his aforementioned essay on *The Tatler* and proposes a sustained, well-informed definition of the essay as a form in itself, where Montaigne features not only as the very father of modern personal authorship, but also as a great author whose renown can be showcased when thinking of a properly 'national' literary tradition.[14] Also thanks to its focus on Montaigne, Hazlitt's description of the essay has remained one of the most vivid accounts of this literary genre:

Quicquid agunt homines nostri farrago libelli, is the general motto of this department of literature. It does not treat of minerals or fossils, the virtues of plants, or the influence of planets; it does not meddle with the forms of belief or systems of philosophy, nor launch into the world of spiritual existences, but it makes familiar with the world of men and women, records their actions, assigns them motives, exhibits their whims, characterizes their pursuits in all their singular and endless variety, ridicules their absurdities, exposes their inconsistencies, 'holds the mirror up to nature', and shews the very age and body of the time its form and pressure; takes minute of our dress, air, looks, words, thoughts, and actions; shews us what we are, and what we are not; plays the whole game of human life over before us, and by making us enlightened spectators of its many-coloured scenes, enables us (if possible) to become tolerably reasonable agents in the one in which we have to perform a part.[15]

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[11] W. HAZLITT, "On the Tatler", in *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt*, eds A.R. WALLER and A. GLOVER, London, Dent, 1903, Vol. I, p. 7.

[12] On this subject, see for instance the rich anthology edited by C.H. KLAUS, *Essayists on the Essay: Montaigne to Our Time*, Iowa City, Iowa U.P., 2012.

[13] W. HAZLITT, "On the Tatler", p. 7.

[14] W. BOUTCHER, "Montaigne in England and America", p. 325.

[15] W. HAZLITT, "On the Periodical Essayists", in *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt*, eds A.R. WALLER and A. GLOVER, Vol. VIII, p. 91.

In this lecture, Hazlitt's attitude to Montaigne assumes the form of a lapidary maxim: "the great merit of Montaigne then was, that he may be said to have been the first who had the courage to say as an author what he felt as a man".[16] Thanks to this second commentary, the impact of Montaigne's example on Hazlitt's idea of the essay becomes clearer, and it is crucial to underline that the latter appreciated the quality of intimacy and personal tones informing the genre as it originated in seventeenth-century France.

This idea of the periodical essay as both a popularly dynamic and an intimately contemplative form also shines through one of Hazlitt's most often quoted literary formulae, that of the 'familiar style', whose aesthetic lineaments entailed, on the one hand, the rejection of the prejudice regarding the alleged vulgarity of common things, words, and works,[17] and, on the other, the establishment of a literary tradition capable of appropriating past illustrious examples while remaining anchored to a contemporary *milieu*.[18] In drawing the readers' attention to the output of his colleague, Charles Lamb, Hazlitt highlighted how the latter's habit to imitate a "quaint" and "old-fashioned" manner of conversation was to be seen as the legacy of a circle of seventeenth-century English authors – "Burton, Fuller, Coryate, Sir Thomas Brown"[19] – who had unquestionably been influenced by the form initiated by Montaigne.[20] Hazlitt was thus tracing the essay's roots back to a pre-Augustan literary scenario close to Montaigne's.

This enthusiastic judgement did not change after Hazlitt's European wanderings through France and Italy, where he was accompanied by his son. In fact, his experience on French soil would sharpen his awareness and cognisance of the French cultural context.[21] In a series of essays later collected in *The Plain Speaker* (1826), Hazlitt further developed his portrait of Montaigne. If in "On the Conversation of Authors" and "On Personal Character" he makes but a cursory reference to him while discussing bookish knowledge and physiognomy, in "On Old English Writers and Speakers" Hazlitt showcases a more comprehensive and eloquent description of the author of the *Essais*; this is significant since it is part of a wider scrutiny of the state of French letters and of their relation to English literature.

As is frequently the case with Hazlitt, he had a specific contemporary target in mind, namely Lord Byron, whose fame abroad worried him as he perceived it to signal a marked decadence of English reputation on the Continent. Typically, Hazlitt moves on to review a considerable number of neglected but illustrious seventeenth-century English authors.[22]

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[16] *Ibidem*, p. 92.

[17] See the following comment: "How simple it is to be dignified without ease, to be pompous without meaning! Surely it is but a mechanical rule for avoiding what is low, to be always pedantic and affected. It is clear you cannot use a vulgar English word, if you never use a common English word at all" (W. HAZLITT, "On the Familiar Style", in *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt*, eds A.R. WALLER and A. GLOVER, Vol. VI, p. 243).

[18] Differently put, "[f]amiliarity was a technique for coming to terms with past high culture; it was also a means of surviving the political iniquities of the present" (G. DART, *Metropolitan Art and Literature, 1810-1840: Cockney Adventures*, Cambridge, CUP, 2012, p. 11).

[19] W. HAZLITT, "On the Familiar Style", p. 254.

[20] P. BUGLIANI, *Metamorfosi di un genere: il saggio in Inghilterra 1580-1780*, Lucca, La Vela, 2020, pp. 46-50.

[21] D. WU, *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man*, p. 358.

[22] In doing so, Hazlitt strikes an amicable blow at his friend and fellow essayist Charles Lamb, deprecating his xenophilic appreciation of the writings of St Evremond. In fact, it was Charles Lamb who more consistently championed a re-evaluation of autochthonous prose writers such as Jeremy Taylor, Robert Burton and Thomas Browne in both his critical writings and his famous *Essays of Elia* and *Last Essays of Elia.*

Although his argument is quite straightforwardly nationalistic in spirit, he concludes on a surprising conciliatory tone. After hinting at the eighteenth-century evolution of literature in the direction of a sobering down "after the revolution, into a strain of greater demureness, into a Dutch and German fidelity of initiation of domestic manners and individual character",[23] he draws a parallel with the situation in France:

French literature has undergone great changes in like manner, and was supposed to be at its highest in the time of Louis XIV. We sympathize less, however, with the pompous and set speeches in the tragedies of Racine and Corneille, or in the serious comedies of Molière, than we do with the grotesque farces of the latter, with the exaggerated descriptions and humour of Rabelais (whose wit was a madness, a drunkenness), or with the accomplished humanity, the easy style, and gentlemanly and scholarlike sense of Montaigne. But these we consider as in a great measure English, or as what the old French character inclined to be, before it was corrupted by courts and academies of criticism.[24]

If the following essay in the collection, "Madame Pasta and Mademoiselle Mars", circles around the account of stern prejudices against the mechanistic imprint of the French frame of mind,[25] what needs highlighting is the fact that, according to Hazlitt, the most favourably appreciable trait of French literature pertains to what can be considered 'English'. Hazlitt stresses the ease with which some landmarks of the French literary canon can coexist with what he casts as the best examples of English early modern prose.

This specific remark might be filtered through Warren Boutcher's insightful and provocative conclusion of his considerations about the Anglo-American absorption of Montaigne, i.e., that "the English Montaigne, the 'great books' of Montaigne sitting on the shelves of bookstores only in English translations, the Montaigne who supposedly invented the English literary essay, the Montaigne who influenced and continues to influence English and American literature, just *is* Montaigne".[26]

3. *A Francophile Education*

Montaigne was thus a recurrent haunt within the essayistic production of Hazlitt, who showed a profound acquaintance not only with the former's work, but also with seventeenth-century prose writing as a whole. In order to assess the influence of this familiarity on his son's career as a translator, a very interesting document may serve as a profitable starting point. In an 1822 piece entitled "On the Conduct of Life", William Hazlitt Sr. spreads open his own pedagogical beliefs and offers his then pre-adolescent son some common-sense pieces of advice for his (quite difficult) schooldays.

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[23] W. HAZLITT, "On Old English Writers and Speakers", in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P.P. HOWE, New York, Anchor Books, 1967, Vol. XII, p. 322.

[24] *Ibidem*, p. 323.

[25] Their "perverse fidelity to detail" (*ibidem*, p. 333) and their lack of "aerial perspective" (*ibidem*) have been significant to the construction of Hazlitt's own metaphysical *Weltanschauung*. See U. NATARAJAN, *Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense: Criticism, Morals, and the Metaphysics of Power*, Oxford, OUP, 1998 for the (still) soundest discussion on this.

[26] W. BOUTCHER, "Montaigne in England and America", pp. 326-27.

Despite the stockpile of commonplaces informing the piece, we can still get glimpses of what a Hazlittian education might have entailed.[27] Predictably enough, the section that interests more closely the discussion of the role of the translator, as enacted by both father and son, is the part where Hazlitt suggests to his son what his relationship towards study and study subjects ought to be. The beginning is quite noteworthy: "As to your studies and school-exercises, I wish you to learn Latin, French, and dancing".[28] Such a remarkable triad deserves closer investigation. If the devotion to dance is to be interpreted in light of Hazlitt's defiance of any excessive consecration of otiose solitary reading, the two languages that he exhorts his son to learn reveal a stimulating pedagogical orientation. The incitement to master Latin also arises from a somehow narcissistic motivation: "I would have you learn Latin partly because I learned it myself, and I would not have you without any of the advantages or sources of knowledge that I possessed – it would be a bar of separation between us".[29] A father's desire that his son should benefit from the very advantages of his own education is only one side of the question, since the classics, in Hazlitt's view, are a sort of 'discipline of humanity':

The peculiar advantage of this mode of education consists not so much in strengthening the understanding, as in softening and refining the taste. It gives men liberal views; it accustoms the mind to take interest in things foreign to itself; to love virtue for its own sake; to prefer fame to life; and glory to riches; and to fix our thoughts on the remote and permanent, instead of narrow and fleeting objects. It teaches us to believe that there is something really great and excellent in the world, surviving all the shocks of accident and fluctuations of opinion, and raises us above that low and servile fear, which bows only to present power and upstart authority.[30]

This power to broaden our horizons, which Hazlitt ascribes to the classics alone, may indeed be loosely referred to any type of (liberal) literary upbringing. Finally, the choice to learn French acquires a great significance when traced back to Hazlitt's envisaging a sort of *in-vitro* reduplication of his own intellectual exuberance. He connects French with the 'business' of life, with the practical side of it as opposed to the loftier ideals concerning the contemplative *otium* typically associated with the figure of the artist: "I would have you, as I said, make yourself master of French, because you may find it of use in the commerce of life".[31] Having himself relied on the trade of letters, mainly (but not only) consisting of periodicals, Hazlitt feels the need to caution his son against scorning such a vibrant world, and thus suggests a mastery of what was, at that time, the *lingua franca* of the erudite and literary world. Given the actual career William the younger would eventually embark on, this last piece of advice sounds the most appropriate.

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[27] Among the most interesting Hazlittian points are his attack on egotism (a critical attitude that he connected with his Dissenter's background) and his views on misanthropy and marriage, which, given the intent of this specific essay, are treated in a palpably mild way by the otherwise notoriously cantankerous essayist.

[28] W. HAZLITT, "On the Conduct of Life; or, Advice to a Schoolboy", in *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt*, eds A.R. WALLER and A. GLOVER, Vol. XII, p. 425.

[29] *Ibidem*, p. 426.

[30] *Ibidem*.

[31] *Ibidem*.

4. *William Hazlitt (1811-1893)*

What seems to be the soundest way to assess William Hazlitt the younger's import in this history of cultural appropriation is to consider his endeavour on the backdrop of his father's seminal appreciation of Michel de Montaigne. This does not imply that the significance of his own commitment should be belittled, but rather that one should always bear in mind the cultural *milieu* in which Hazlitt the younger lived and worked.

As a matter of fact, "that Little Nero"[32] was left, at his father's death, with no other possible professional outcome than becoming the editor of the latter's literary output, which he did collect and publish in 1836, along with an edition of probably the most ambitious philosophical work by Hazlitt, *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action*, which had been first published in 1805 and gone largely neglected since then.

In the 1830s William Jr. became a collaborator of the *Morning Chronicle,* thus entering the same political scenario of periodicals that had been animated by his father's belligerent voice before him, and would be soon featuring Charles Dickens's and William Makepeace Thackeray's insights. William Jr.'s employment was granted by William Coulson, whom he had met through Charles and Mary Lamb's mediation, thus through the agency of his late father's literary *coterie*. It was then that another meeting, with David Bogue, marked a turn in his career, namely that of the completion of his professionalisation as a translator and editor.[33] He became a contributor to Bogue's *European Library* series, whose aim was to provide affordable editions of classics of continental literature like Victor Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris*, whose very first English translation was indeed Hazlitt Jr.'s. This European dimension can be read against the background of a cultural ferment that characterised the early and mid-nineteenth century and whose most compelling testimony is the *Introduction to the Literature of Europe* (1837) by Henry Hallam.

Alongside this steady 'European commitment' to Bogue's project, Hazlitt Jr. continued his freelance editing and translating job for other publishers, and it was his collaboration with John Templeman that ensured British readers the first complete edition of Michel de Montaigne's works in 1842. Featuring not only the essays, but also the very first translation of the *Journal de voyage* and a selection of ten private *Letters,* this endeavour must be considered a fundamental step in the history of the English reception of Montaigne.

First of all, some comments are due on Hazlitt Jr.'s *Essais* text, where he did not include his own translation, but rather revised for a modern audience the version by Charles Cotton, dating from 1685-1686. Moreover, at that time, Florio's version was not so popular among the nineteenth-century educated *elite*.[34] As claimed by Philip Ford, while "Florio's version remained out of print until the late nineteenth century, Cotton's translation became

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[32] Perhaps the most famous mention of Hazlitt the younger is in one of John Keats's letters, where the poet came up with this interesting diminutive appellation. The phrase is quoted by Hazlitt the younger's son, who not only revised his father's translation of Montaigne discussed here, but also wrote a detailed memorial of the Hazlitt clan, underlining the literariness of such a distinguished household. See W. CAREW HAZLITT, *Four Generations of a Literary Family: The Hazlitts in England, Ireland and America, Their Friends and Their Fortunes, 1725-1896*, London and New York, George Redway, 1897, Vol. I, p. 106.

[33] M. LESSER, "Professionals", in P. FRANCE and K. HAYNES (eds), *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English*, Oxford, OUP, 2006, Vol. IV (1790-1900), pp. 90-91.

[34] It was only in 1892 that Florio's Montaigne regained its place in the history of cultural translation, also thanks to its inclusion in David Nutt's editorial project (the *Tudor Translation* series).

the standard version of the French text, still being reprinted in the twentieth century".[35]
The case of Montaigne's reception in the mid-nineteenth century was quite peculiar, and
it is therefore all the more significant to place Hazlitt Jr.'s editorial choice in its proper
literary context:

Two Renaissance prose writers had never gone out of favour: Rabelais and Montaigne. For these
the Nineteenth Century was generally content with the old translations. The Rabelais of Urquarth
and Motteux (1653-94) continued to be published sometimes in a bowdlerized form, and was not
displaced by the relatively accurate, but archaizing *Five Books and Minor Writings* of W.F. Smith
(1893). Montaigne was read in revised versions of Charles Cotton's translation of 1685-6, which was
given a new lease life by W.C. Hazlitt's edition of 1877: the text, revised by the editor's father William
Hazlitt the younger, was closer to Cotton than that given in eighteenth-century editions.[36]

The importance here granted to William Jr.'s edition of the *Works* is due to the fact that,
although its actual novelty consisted in the translation of the *Journal,* there is an uncommon
abundance of paratextual matter specifically dedicated to the *Essais* proper. The general
"Preface" does indeed tackle this latter work alone, giving an invaluable insight into Haz-
litt Jr.'s idea of the role of the translator.

The first question he addresses is the choice to re-issue Cotton's translation. Instead of
justifying his 'recycling', he endorses Cotton's party with ample quotations from the latter's
paratextual elements such as the "Dedication" and "Preface"; he then proceeds to ascer-
tain his personal contribution, i.e., the correction of many inaccuracies in the almost two-
hundred-year-old Restoration 'Englishing' of the French *essayiste*. Hazlitt lists five textual
loci where his intervention was deemed indispensable (see *Appendix*).

Even a preliminary glance allows one to detect the accuracy and scrupulousness of
Hazlitt Jr.'s emendations, as for instance in the case of Book II, Chapter 6 (Table 5),
where he intervenes and corrects Cotton's misinterpretation of the referent of a relative
clause, thus changing the somewhat hilarious nonsensical image – Hazlitt calls it "a sad
imputation"[37] – of Montaigne choosing to give his wife a lame horse. In Book I, Chapter
55 (Table 1), Cotton misinterprets the French "barbarie" for a toponym, translating it as
"Barbary", instead of "barbarism". A further lexical misunderstanding is at the core of
Cotton's version of a passage in Book I, Chapter 57 (Table 3), where he renders "oisiveté"
with "Vacancy", rather than "idleness". More serious is the mistake Cotton makes in
a passage from Book I, Chapter 56 (Table 2), though, in a sense, counterbalancing the
misogynistic mishap of the horse/wife blunder (II, 6): by misreading Montaigne's claim
about women being unable to deal with Theology, Cotton transforms Montaigne's mi-
sogynistic assertion into a general (and rather inconsequential) statement according to
which "Man" (with a capital letter, meaning humanity, both men and women) would be
unfit to Theology. Another 'religious' mishap is unearthed by Hazlitt in Cotton's version
concerning Book II, Chapter 2 (Table 4), where he transposes the French word "secte"
into the contextually ambiguous "sect", thus branding the philosophical Stoic School as
a rather unworthy clique.

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[35] P. Ford, "Charles Cotton's Montaigne", *Montaigne Studies: An Interdisciplinary Forum*, 24, 2012, p. 118.
[36] P. France, "France", in Id. and K. Haynes (eds), *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English*,
p. 233.
[37] W. Hazlitt (ed.), *The Complete Works of Michel de Montaigne*, London, Templeman, 1842. The "Preface"
bears no indication of page number.

Hazlitt Jr. demonstrates a sound linguistic control of the French language, and his translation verges on a multi-layered activity that, though still remaining a cultural undertaking (similar to Cotton's Restoration attempt), also acquires a more 'technical' dimension. Such a dimension looks up to an ideal of accuracy that cannot but be traced to the nineteenth-century developments of philology as a human science in the Romantic period.[38] Besides mastering the language, Hazlitt was aware of the coeval critical debate on literary translation, as witnessed by his quoting one of the authorities he turned to in order to gain expertise and act as Cotton's corrector:

The style and spirit of Cotton's version it would be impossible to improve upon: and I have no hesitation in expressing the opinion that, the inaccuracies in question being now carefully corrected, the present edition of the essays of Montaigne fully comes up to the definition of a good translation suggested by Lord Woodhouselee, viz. – "That in which the merit of the original work is so completely transfused into another language as to be as distinctly apprehended, and as strongly felt, by a native as it is to those who speak in the language of the original work." Here, indeed, as in the case of Ozell's Rabelais, the position might be even more strongly put.[39]

Alexander Fraser Tytler, Lord Woodhouselee (1747-1813) was a prominent figure of his times, his career spanning from historiography and legal studies to periodical essay-writing and the translation of Italian poetry (Petrarch) and German drama (Schiller's *Die Räuber*). His *Essay on the Principles of Translation* (1791) was also very influential. Fraser Tytler's conception drew near to what one might suitably call a 'European library', and his idea of translation resembled "a primary vehicle for cross-cultural exchanges, one which could make available 'all the stores of ancient knowledge, and creating a free intercourse of science and of literature between all modern nations'".[40] From the definition quoted by Hazlitt Jr., Fraser would also draw three corollaries,[41] the third of which is accompanied by a reflection that is worth quoting in full, since it includes specific examples from Montaigne:

The translation is perfect, when the translator finds in his own language an idiomatic phrase corresponding to that of the original: MONTAIGNE (*Ess.*: 1, I, c: 29) says of Gallio "lequel ayant été envoyé en exile en l'isle de Lesbos, on fut averti à Rome, *qu'il s'y donnoit du bon temps* et que ce qu'on lui avoit enjoint pour peine, lui turnoit à commodité." The difficulty of translating this sentence lies in the idiomatic phrase "*qu'il s'y donnoit du bon temps*". Cotton finding a parallel idiom in English, has translated the passage with becoming ease and spirit: "As it happened to one Gallio, who having been sent an exile to the isle of Lesbos, news was not long after brought to Rome that *he there lived as merry as the day was long*; and that what had been enjoined him for a penance, turned out to his greatest pleasure and satisfaction." Thus, in another passage of the same author (*Essais*. 1, I, c: 29): "*Si j'eusse été chef de part*, j'eusse prins autre voie plus naturelle." "*Had I rul'd the roast*, I should have taken another and more natural course." So likewise (*Ess.*: 1, I, c: 25): "Mais d'y enforcer plus

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[38] Romanticism, and especially German Romanticism, can be considered the very cradle of the modern ideal of translation as both a cultural practice and also (and perhaps primarily) a practical dexterity that entailed a thorough study. For a historiographic array, see A. BERMAN, *The Experience of the Foreign: Culture and Translation in Romantic Germany*, Engl. trans. S. HAYVAERT, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1992.

[39] W. HAZLITT (ed.), *The Complete Works of Michel de Montaigne*, n.p.

[40] D. SAGLIA, *Romantic Translations*, p. 6.

[41] "That the translation should give a complete transcript of the ideas of the original work"; "That the style and manner of writing should be of the same character with that of the original"; and "That the translation should have all the *ease* of original composition" (A. FRASER TYTLER, *Essay on the Principles of Translation*, London, Dent, [1791] 1907, p. 7; emphasis added).

avant, et de *m'être rongé les ongles à l'etude d'Aristote*, monarche de la doctrine moderne." "But to dive farther than that, and to have *cudgell'd my brains in the study of Aristotle*, the monarch of all modern learning".[42]

Fraser Tytler contributed to a redefinition of the role and figure of the translator, who began to acquire a status that transcended the mere label of 'interlingual translitterator' in favour of a more reputable position as creative agent:

From the consideration of those general rules of translation which in the foregoing essay I have endeavoured to illustrate, it will appear no unnatural conclusion to assert, that he only is perfectly accomplished for the duty of a translator who possesses a genius akin to that of the original author. I do not mean to carry this proposition so far as to affirm, that in order to give a perfect translation of the works of Cicero, a man must actually be as great an orator, or inherit the same extent of the philosophical genius; but he must have a mind capable of discerning the full merits of his original, of attending with an acute perception to the whole of his reasoning, and of entering with warmth and energy of feeling into all the beauties of his composition.[43]

In the twentieh century, this stress on language proficiency and idiomatic competence would be placed with new intensity by another literary figure involved in the Anglo-French dialectics, namely Hilaire Belloc in his work *On Translation* (1931). Belloc's contribution offers a "brief but highly intelligent and systematic approach to the practical problems of translating and to the whole question of the status of the translated text".[44] It can be said to stand between accounts hailing the translator as a genius of sorts, virtually on a level with the creative author, and other assessments that saw the translator as a professional figure whose primary aim was crossing linguistic barriers and facilitating the act of reading. It was on this threshold that William the younger seemed to aim at positioning himself.

Adding further qualities to the profile of the conscientious scholar, Hazlitt Jr. put together a critical paratext which is indeed crucial to the understanding of his work as a translator. This paratext is made up of the aforementioned "Preface", where he sketches out his project; a standard bibliographical insert; a selection of "Critical Opinions"; a section containing "Bibliographical Notices" that trace and systematise the editorial history of the *Essais*; and an introduction to the *Diary of the Journey of Michel de Montaigne into Italy through Switzerland and Germany in the years 1580 and 1581*, where Hazlitt Jr. prefaces his translation of Montaigne's diary via a detailed account of the circumstances that led him to focus on it. The overall impression is of a scrupulousness that verges on punctiliousness, as for instance when the author sets about describing in detail the manuscript of the journal he used for his translation.[45]

Although not original, the most remarkable piece of Hazlitt Jr.'s output is the "Critical Opinions" section, which includes twenty-one extracts of various length from secondary works relating to the *Essais* and to Montaigne, starting from the long "Preface" to the 1595 edition of the *Essais* penned by Marie de Gournay, Montaigne's *fille d'alliance*. Without sounding like a plead for the recognition of a proto-feminist pre-eminency in the transmis-

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[42] *Ibidem*, p. 138.
[43] *Ibidem*, pp. 204-205.
[44] S. BASSNETT, *Translation Studies. Third Edition*, London and New York, Routledge, 2002, p. 81.
[45] See W. HAZLITT (ed.), *The Complete Works of Michel de Montaigne*, p. 523.

sion of Montaigne's masterpiece, this inclusion is significant because it sheds light for the first time on a seminal female contribution to the dissemination of Montaigne's essayistic lesson (a share that both Florio and Cotton had tellingly excised from their translations).[46]

One of the most striking features of this catalogue is also the fact that "it separates and implicitly parallels the stories of French […] and of English critical reception of Montaigne",[47] juxtaposing a French list spanning from Gournay to Jean-François de La Harpe (1739-1803) with a British one, extending from George Savile, Viscount Halifax, to the already mentioned Henry Hallam (1777-1859). This process of 'Englishing' was enacted with a purposeful intent, and can easily be interpreted as a conscious act of cultural translation of a 'French' genre onto English shores.[48] This act of critical assemblage was unquestionably conspicuous, and the choice to give a significant predominance to pronouncements by English writers illustrates how deep and vibrant the anglophone debate was.

5. *Conclusion*

The role of the editor was evidently one that Hazlitt Jr. took on very seriously. He managed to combine the material experience he gained in the process of editing his father's (mainly essayistic) works with the practical skills in foreign languages that his father himself had recommended he should cultivate during his school years. With reference to the interpretation of Montaigne's writing, what he lacked in terms of closeness was supplied by his father's insightful decision to include a sound linguistic education in William Jr.'s academic curriculum. His acquired mastery of the French language, alongside the connections in the publishing business provided by his father's *coterie*, ensured Hazlitt Jr. the intellectual capability and practical possibility to pave the way for a crucial step in Montaigne's afterlife. If analysed with an eye to his father's scholarly interest in the French master, this was also a noteworthy step in the history of the personal essay as a genre.

Moreover, behind this literary and philological enterprise stands one of the most straining relationships in the life of any human being, i.e., the symbolical and psychologically invested confrontation with the father. William Hazlitt Sr.'s image, embodied in his essayistic voice, kept looming large in his son's literary activity. And, in light of the Montaigne project discussed here, this might be seen as the perpetuation of a legacy that was not at all exclusive of their family, but interested a whole plethora of authors who, ever since 1580, have continued to chisel and adjust an astounding literary 'invention' such as the essay, as originally conceived by a retired man of law in Southern France.

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[46] The role of both de Gournay and the "distinguished female patrons" prompting and enjoying the fruits of Florio's first English translation is dealt with in W.M. HAMLIN, *Montaigne's English Journey*, p. 9 and *passim.*

[47] W. BOUTCHER, "Montaigne in England and America", p. 326.

[48] See on this C.H. KLAUS, *Essayists on the Essay*, pp. xv-xvii.

Appendix

Table 1[49]
Book I, Chapter 55

En la plus espesse barbarie, les femmes Scythes, apres s'estre lavées, se saupoudrent et encroustent tout le corps et le visage de certaine drogue qui naist en leur terroir, odoriferante; et, pour approcher les hommes, ayans osté ce fard, elles s'en trouvent et polies et parfumées. (M. DE MONTAIGNE, *Essais*, p. 316)	In the wildest part of Barbary, the Scythian Women, after Bathing, were wont to Powder and Crust their Faces, and whole Bodies, with a certain Odoriferous Drug, growing in their own Territories; which being cleans'd off, when they were found Perfum'd and Sleek. (C. COTTON [ed.], *Essays*, pp. 611-12)	In an age of the darkest barbarism, the Scythian women, after bathing, were wont to powder and crust the face, and the whole body, with a certain odoriferous drug, growing in their country; which being washed off, when they were about to have familiarity with men, made them perfumed and sleek. (W. HAZLITT [ed.], *The Complete Works*, p. 146)	In deepest Barbary the Scythian women powder themselves after washing and smother their whole face and body with a certain sweet-smelling unguent, native to their soil; when they take off this cosmetic they find themselves smooth and nice-smelling. (M. DE MONTAIGNE, *The Complete Essays*, 1993)

Table 2
Book I, Chapter 56

Mais ce n'est pas par cette preuve seulement qu'on pourroit verifier que les femmes ne sont guieres propres à traiter les matieres de la Theologie. Une vraye priere et une religieuse reconciliation de nous à Dieu, elle ne peut tomber en une ame impure et soumise lors mesmes à la domination de Satan. (M. DE MONTAIGNE, *Essais*, p. 325)	But it is by this proof only, that a Man may conclude, no Man is very fit to treat the Theological Affairs. A true Prayer, and Religious reconciling of our selves to Almighty God, cannot enter into an impure Soul, one at the very instant subjected to the very Dominion of Satan. (C. COTTON [ed.], *Essays*, p. 629)	But this is not the only proof we have that women are not altogether fit to treat of theological matters. A true prayer and religious reconciling of ourselves to God, cannot enter into an impure soul, subjected at the time to the dominion od Satan. (W. HAZLITT [ed.], *The Complete Works*, p. 150)	But that is not the only proof we have of the truth that it hardly befits women to treat Theological matters. A devout reconciliation with God, a true prayer, cannot befall a soul which is impure and, at that very time, submissive to the domination of Satan. (M. DE MONTAIGNE, *The Complete Essays*, 1993)

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[49] In the first column, Montaigne's original French text is the one provided by the *Montaigne Project* online edition: M. DE MONTAIGNE, *Essais*, University of Chicago, ARTFL Montaigne Project, ed. P. DESAN, http://artflsrv02.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/getobject.pl?c.0:2:0.montaigne (last accessed on 1 June 2020). The two central columns contain Cotton's and Hazlitt Jr.'s versions: C. COTTON (ed.), *Essays of Michael Seigneur de Montaigne*, London, Printed for T. Basset, M. Gilliflower and W. Hensman, 1685; W. HAZLITT (ed.), *The Complete Works of Michel de Montaigne*. For a contemporary comparison, Screech's 'reference' translation is given in the last column: M. DE MONTAIGNE, *The Complete Essays*, Engl. trans. M.A. SCREECH, London, Penguin, 1993, Kindle edition.

Table 3
Book I, Chapter 57

Pour ce coup, je me plains des loix, non pas dequoy elles nous laissent trop tard à la besongne, mais dequoy elles nous y emploient trop tard. Il me semble que, considerant la foiblesse de nostre vie, et à combien d'escueils ordinaires et naturels elle est exposée, on n'en devroit pas faire si grande part à la naissance, à l'oisiveté, et à l'apprentissage. (M. DE MONTAIGNE, *Essais*, p. 329)	And for this reason it is, that I complain our Laws, not that they keep us too long to our Work, but that they set us to work too late. For the Frailty of Life consider'd, and to how many Natural and Accidental Rubs it is Obnoxious and Expos'd: for a large Vacancy, and so tedious a course of Education. (C. COTTON [ed.], *Essays*, pp. 637-38)	Methinks, considering the frailty of life, and the many natural and ordinary wrecks to which it is exposed, we should not give so large a portion of it to idleness, either in childhood or in apprenticeship to the world. (W. HAZLITT [ed.], *The Complete Works*, p. 152)	But now I am complaining not that the laws allow us to work so late but that they are so late in putting us to work. It seems to me that, considering the frailty of our life and the number of natural hazards to which it is exposed, we should not allow so large a place in it to being born, to leisure and to our apprenticeship. (M. DE MONTAIGNE, *The Complete Essays*, 1993)

Table 4
Book II, Chapter 2

Toutes actions hors les bornes ordinaires sont subjectes à sinistre interpretation, d'autant que nostre goust n'advient non plus à ce qui est au dessus de luy, qu'à ce qui est au dessous. Laissons cette autre secte faisant expresse profession de fierté. (M. DE MONTAIGNE, *Essais*, p. 347)	All actions exceeding the ordinary bounds are liable to Sinister interpretation: For as much as our liking does no more proceed from what is above, than from what is below it. Let us have this other Sect and make a downright profession of fierceness. (C. COTTON [ed.], *Essays*, p. 27)	All actions exceeding the ordinary bounds are liable to sinister interpretation: for asmuch as our taste does no more affect what is above than what is below it. Let us leave that other set, which makes an express profession of haughty superiority. (W. HAZLITT [ed.], *The Complete Works*, p. 159)	All actions which exceed the usual limits are open to sinister interpretations, since higher things are no more to our taste than inferior ones. Let us leave aside that other School which makes an express profession of pride. (M. DE MONTAIGNE, *The Complete Essays*, 1993)

Table 5
Book II, Chapter 6

Comme j'approchai de chez moy, où l'alarme de ma cheute avoit des-jà couru, et que ceux de ma famille m'eurent rencontré avec les cris accoustumez en telles choses, non seulement je respondois quelque mot à ce qu'on me demandoit, mais encore ils disent que je m'advisay de commander qu'on donnast un cheval à ma femme, que je voyoy s'empestrer et se tracasser dans le chemin, qui est montueux et mal-aisé. (M. DE MONTAIGNE, *Essais*, p. 377)	As I drew near my own house, where the Alarm of my fall was already got before me, and that my family were come out to meet me, with the hubbub usual in such cases; I did not only make some little answer to some questions that were askt me, but they moreover tell me, that I had so much sense, as to order that a horse I saw trip and faulter in the way, which is mountainous and uneasy, should be given to my wife. (C. COTTON [ed.], *Essays*, p. 77)	As I drew near my own house, where the alarm of my fall was already got before me, and my family ran to me with the clamour usual in such cases, I did not only make some little answer to the questions that were asked me, but they moreover tell me that I had so much sense about me as to order them to give a horse to my wife, who, I saw, was toiling and laboring along the road, which was a steep and uneasy one. (W. HAZLITT [ed.], *The Complete Works*, p. 172)	As I was nearing my home, to which news of my fall had already run quickly, and after members of my family had greeted me with the cries usual in such circumstances, not only did I answer a word or two to their questions but they say that I was determined to order a horse to be provided for my wife whom I saw struggling and stumbling along the road, which is difficult and steep. (M. DE MONTAIGNE, *The Complete Essays*, 1993)

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Karen Buczynski-Lee

Celluloid Gardens in the Time of Consumption

Abstract: This article critically focuses on two out of the approximately one thousand films directed by Alice Guy-Blaché (July 1, 1873 - March 24, 1968), commonly hailed as the first narrative filmmaker and female director. In *La Fée aux Choux* (*The Cabbage Fairy*, 1896) and *Falling Leaves* (1912), Guy-Blaché introduced two gardens as crucial characters within the narrative, depicting them as living breathing entities in the time of consumption or tubercolosis. Tuberculosis was the leading cause of death in Europe from the 18th to the 20th century, impacting on the way art was made. The first narrative films by Guy-Blaché reflected this continuation and exploration of the interrelationship between the arts and the disease. Accordingly, the present paper investigates a set of relevant metaphors unfolding through poetry, painting, opera and, specifically, the two films mentioned above, in an overlapping of scientific, artistic, and cultural discourses. My analysis concludes with an optimistic view linked to a scientific breakthrough that explores the world of bacteria as the starting point for a cure for TB, and possibly other diseases. It also refers to the magic of places like gardens, as emblematically suggested by the opening lines of "Fairy Song", a poem by John Keats, who died of tuberculosis in 1821: "Shed no tear – O, shed no tear! / The flower will bloom another year. / Weep no more – O, weep no more! / Young Buds sleep in the root's white core".

Keywords: Alice Guy-Blaché. Silent Film. Tuberculosis. *La Fée aux Choux*. *Falling Leaves*. First Feminist Filmmaker.

1. *Introduction*

Consumption, or tuberculosis, is an illness caused by bacteria primarily affecting the lungs, but which can occur in any organ of the body, including the spine.[1] It was first recorded in a legal text retrieved on an ancient stone pillar and connected with Hammurabi, the sixth king of the First Babylonian dynasty, who lived in the second millennium BCE.[2] In modern times, Italy, and Lucca in particular, were ahead in identifying consumption as a contagious disease. The first official record dates back to 1699 and, in 1735, it resulted in a declaration by the Health Council of the Republic of Lucca which ordered the compulsory notification and isolation of consumptives, forbidding admission in public hospitals and establishing specific places for their treatment (the "sanatoriums").[3] The first poetic

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[1] See Mayo Clinic, "Tuberculosis: Symptoms and Causes", https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/tuberculosis/symptoms-causes/syc-20351250 (last accessed on 29 December 2019).

[2] See Y. Agarwal, R.K. Chopra, D.K. Gupta, and R.S. Sethi, "The Tuberculosis Timeline: Of White Plague, a Birthday Present, and Vignettes of Myriad Hues", *Astrocyte*, 4 (1), 2017, pp. 7-26. In particular: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-Hammurabis-inscription-in-Babylonia-writes-of-tuberculosis-as-a-chronic-lung-disease_fig4_320882628 (last accessed on 21 February 2020).

[3] See, among others, I. Barberis, N.L. Bragazzi, L. Galluzzo, and M. Martini, "The History of Tuberculosis: From the First Historical Records to the Isolation of Koch's Bacillus", *Journal of Preventive Medicine and Hygiene*, 58 (1), 2017, pp. E9-E12.

description was recorded in the 8th century BCE in Homer's *Odyssey*, which commented on the illness as taking the "soul from the body".[4]

This was the beginning of an artistic impetus that coped with suffering and death caused by tuberculosis; an interrelationship emerged between the illness, science and art within works characterised by literary, operatic and filmic virtuosity. In the 18th and 19th centuries, tuberculosis had become epidemic in Europe, where annual mortality rates ranged between 800 to 1,000 per 100,000 per year. Between 1851 and 1910, in England and Wales, for instance, four million people died from tuberculosis, more than one third of them aged 15-34 and another half aged 20-24.[5] In France, the stigma attached to having tuberculosis resulted in underreporting, but it is reckoned that, up to 1914, the national rates amounted to 100,00 per year.[6] Just as COVID-19 now targets primarily the elderly, robbing us of our parents and grandparents, tuberculosis was called the 'robber of youth'. It was the youth that often suffered from the disease, or were surrounded by those dying and suffering, who sought to make sense of it by also drawing on the arts.

The disease thus became romanticised in society thanks to many poets, writers, and artists who sought to understand life's meaning in this time of death. John Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale", written two years before his death in Italy in 1821, happened to prophesy his future through poetry, as in the line "Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies".[7] Importantly, the changing metaphors of consumption in the arts reflected the unfolding scientific understanding of the disease itself. As with COVID-19 today, with the memes and comedic reflections on the scientific recommendations to ward off illness and death, so too in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries.

In particular, three operas written within a forty-year period can be said to show the evolution in thinking about the disease. First, Giuseppe Verdi's *La traviata* (1853, *Lady of the Night*) tells of concubine Violetta Valery, who is dying from consumption and, through this consuming illness, is absolved of all her wrongdoing. Secondly, Jacques Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffman* (1881, Act III) presents a story about medical impotence which reflects the reality of the last decades of the 19th century, when doctors could merely diagnose the disease. However, the ailment was by that time believed to be hereditary, so that Antonia is no longer burdened by sin as Violetta in *La traviata*. Indeed, the sardonically named Dr Miracle asks, "[Has she] inherited [consumption] from her mother?", and suggests she sings to purge the illness. Thirdly, Giacomo Puccini's *La bohème* (1896) builds on a dramatic situation with arguably no attempt at a constructive understanding of such a pathology. No one is saved: the heroine Mimì dies surrounded by a philosopher, a poet, a painter, and a singer, the message probably being that the wisdom that thinkers, artists, and scientists may have contributed in the past is now help-

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[4] See Y. AGARWAL, R.K. CHOPRA, D.K. GUPTA, and R.S. SETHI, "The Tuberculosis Timeline: Of White Plague, a Birthday Present, and Vignettes of Myriad Hues". In particular: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Homers-epic-poem-Odyssey-penned-in-8th-century-BC-refers-to-tuberculosis-as-a-grievous_fig1_320882628 (last accessed on 3 December 2019).

[5] See A.H. GALE, "A Century of Changes in the Mortality and Incidence of the Principal Infections of Childhood", 1945, https://adc.bmj.com/content/archdischild/20/101/2.full.pdf (last accessed on 3 December 2019).

[6] See A. MITCHELL, "An Inexact Science: The Statistics of Tuberculosis in Late Nineteenth-Century France", *Social History of Medicine*, 3 (3), December 1990, pp. 387-403.

[7] J. KEATS, "Ode to a Nightingale", 1819, l. 26, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44479/ode-to-a-nightingale (last accessed on 25 March 2020).

less against tuberculosis. There are no remedies, no logical explanations or clear answers.

Conversely, in that same year, 1896, Alice Guy-Blaché (July 1, 1873 - March 24, 1968) took up the artistic cudgel through her use of cinema, which would place her more in line with the scientific understanding that consumption, eventually known as 'tuberculosis', was caused by contagious bacteria.[8] This first narrative and female filmmaker harnessed the new medium and engaged in an artistic conversation about tuberculosis through film. Her first movie, entitled *La Fée aux Choux* (1896, *The Cabbage Fairy*), can be approached as an affirmation of life. In 1905, it was followed by *Esmeralda*, her first film about consumption and a work based on Victor Hugo's renowned novel *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1831), or *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* (1833).[9] Set in 15th-century Paris, Hugo's story centres on Quasimodo, a bellringer at Notre-Dame Cathedral who is afflicted with severe spinal deformity due to tuberculosis of the spine, and who falls in love with a 16-year-old gypsy woman named Esmeralda (Agnes). Hugo writes that, long after the main events depicted in the novel, workmen discovered two entwined skeletons, one of a young woman, and the other of a man with a twisted spine. The French book's literary affirmation of life and of the unassailable power and beauty of love continued on screen thanks to Alice Guy-Blaché, who thus commended the cinematic medium: "In the silent cinema, we had discovered a fresh, limpid spring, joyously reflecting the grasses, watercress and willows that bordered it; we had only to wet our lips in it to staunch our thirst".[10] From 1896 to 1920, she innovatively laid the groundwork for an art medium "at whose birth [she] assisted",[11] and which became such a thriving industry that, she later bemoaned, it would shift away from her notion of "a fresh limpid spring"; indeed, from "every corner of the world gold hunters"[12] reached and capitalised on that spring.

In this paper, attention will be drawn to the settings of two films by Guy-Blaché, through which she critically explored the importance of wellness, well-being, and "being in herself".[13] In fact, *La Fée aux Choux* and *Falling Leaves*[14] place the garden as an indispensable character within the narrative, as a projection of Eden but also as an emblem of insight, integrity, and acuity. In the former movie, the story ironically takes place in a garden of cabbages; working as legendary symbols of interconnectedness, these vegetables are seen as giving birth to male children from beneath their leaves, rather than from between the "two lips" and legs of women.[15] *Falling Leaves* was released sixteen years later, when Alice had

[8] A key figure for these modern advances in clinical medicine was Heinrich Hermann Robert Koch (1843-1910), a German physician and microbiologist as well as a pioneering scientist in the field of bacteriology (including the identification of the bacteria responsible for consumption).

[9] See *Esmeralda*, Dir. A. GUY-BLACHÉ and V.-H. JASSET, 10", 35 mm, Société des Etablissements L. Gaumont, France, 1905, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Esmeralda (last accessed on 1 September 2019).

[10] A. GUY-BLACHÉ, *The Memoirs of Alice Guy Blaché*, Engl. trans. R. BLACHÉ and S. BLACHÉ, ed. A. SLIDE, Lanham, MD, Scarecrow Press, 1996, p. 30.

[11] *Ibidem,* p. 1.

[12] *Ibidem*, p. 30.

[13] This phrase is taken from J.-P. SARTRE, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, Engl. trans. and with an Introduction by H.E. BARNES, New York, Washington Square Press, (1943) 1984.

[14] See, respectively, *La Fée aux Choux* (*The Cabbage Fairy*), Dir. and Prod. A. GUY-BLACHÉ, 60", 35 mm, France, 1896, 1900 and 1902, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-_cYhqVblLc and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Fée_aux_Choux (last accessed on 10 December 2019); *Falling Leaves*, Dir. and Prod. A. GUY-BLACHÉ, Solax Studios, USA, 1912, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-_cYhqVblLc (last accessed on 3 November 2019).

[15] See on this point L. IRIGARAY, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Engl. trans. C. PORTER and C. BURKE, New York, Cornell U.P., 1985, p. 24.

moved to the United States and became the co-producer of the Solax Company. It shows an autumnal garden as a prominent scenario, which, however, must be thwarted and tricked by "Little Trixy" in an effort to stop the death of her sister, who is suffering from tuberculosis.

2. *Alice Guy-Blaché and the 'Beginning in Being'*

> Thus Being cut from Essence which is its ground becomes 'mere empty immediacy'. This is how the Phenomenology of Mind defines it by presenting pure Being 'from the point of view of truth' as the immediate. If the beginning of logic is to be the immediate, we shall then find beginning in Being.[16]

In 1896, Alice Guy-Blaché directed her first film about a subject matter of which she had full awareness, since, when she was seventeen years old, she had worked for a year taking care of pregnant textile workers and their babies. Many of the mothers undoubtedly would have died of tuberculosis leaving babies orphaned with many dying before their first birthday.[17] This heralded the beginning of a career that impacted on the way film was made, moving away from the theatrical to the catch cry of 'being natural', 'acting natural'.

Guy-Blaché was born on July 1, 1873, in Paris, after her mother (Marie Clotilde Franceline Aubert) and father (Emile Guy) made an arduous seven-week journey to France from Chile in order for Marie to have one of her children (being born) French. The woman stayed three months and then left Alice in Belgium in the care of her maternal grandmother, who lived in Carouge, "a Geneva suburb dear to artists",[18] and thus exposing her from infancy to the artistic culture of the 19th century. Marie Aubert's marriage had been an arranged settlement with Emile Guy's family, who were established book editors and sellers in Valparaíso and Santiago, Chile. This connection to books and reading subsequently allowed Alice to recognise the potentiality for cinema to tell stories, rather than what was the norm, as of 1896, for 'demonstration films'. In her memoir, she observed that, "daughter of an editor, I had read a good deal and retained quite a bit [...] and I thought that one might do better than these demonstration films".[19]

When Alice was three years old, her mother, whom she says she had forgotten, returned to collect her daughter and take her back to Chile. Learning Spanish quickly, Alice lived as an upper-middle-class child in fairly luxurious circumstances until she was six. She was then brought back to France by her father to be bordered at the Sacred Heart Convent's school in Viry on the Swiss border. There she found her three sisters, who had been previously ensconced. After violent earthquakes in Chile, her father, now poorer, returned to France to place the children in a less expensive school. At the same time, in 1886, Alice's brother died of "rheumatic heart", and this precipitated her mother's return to France, while her father passed away soon after, at the age of fifty-one, "more broken by sorrow than of illness".[20]

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[16] J.-P. SARTRE, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, p. 45.
[17] See "Infant Mortality in France", Institut National d'Études Démographiques, https://www.ined.fr/en/everything_about_population/demographic-facts-sheets/focus-on/infant_mortality_france/ (last accessed on 19 March 2020).
[18] A. GUY-BLACHÉ, *The Memoirs of Alice Guy Blaché*, p. 3.
[19] *Ibidem*, p. 25.
[20] *Ibidem*, p. 11.

Alice's mother subsequently attained the position of Director at the 'Mutualité maternelle', having worked similarly in Chile, and insisted that sixteen-year-old Alice accompany her. The task was demanding, insofar as it required her to carry newborn babies with running eye-infections to the surgery, where a wait of a few hours might have made the babies blind. This early and taxing work experience was to precipitate feelings of sympathy, pity, and admiration in her. Besides, it was channeled and translated not only in her first cinematic production (*La Fée aux Choux*), but also in other films.

After less than a year, both mother and daughter resigned, due to Marie's disagreement with the authorities. It should be remembered that, although French female textile workers had no rights at the time,[21] the women paid into unions which, in turn, provided maternity and child-birth support through the Mutualité maternelle. They nonetheless had no vote or say in the way things were administered and it is highly probable that the 'disagreement' was over the injustice of the system. Alice was then seventeen years of age and, at the suggestion of a friend of the family, she began her study of shorthand typing. Her first position was that of a secretary at a varnish manufacturer, where she experienced continual verbal sexual abuse that resulted in her being reprimanded for fighting back.[22]

In 1894, a position as secretary at 'Le Comptoir général de la photographie' came up and Alice enthusiastically met the challenge. Her prior experience in an all-male work environment had instilled in her a sense of resilience and determination. Such qualities were essential in the context linked to the invention of the typewriter, which, like early computer work, was primarily considered the domain of men, who "had a near monopoly in clerical and administrative work".[23] This meant that women's chances of getting such posts were problematic. It was difficult and, as evidenced by Guy-Blaché, it required one to be persevering and daring:

Timidly I offered my letter of recommendation, he read it, examined me in silence and finally said "the recommendation is excellent but this post is important. I fear mademoiselle that you may be too young." All my hopes crumbled. "But sir," I pleaded, "I'll get over that." He looked at me again, amused. "Alas that's true," he said, "you shall get over it, so let's give it a try".[24]

The following year the company was sold to civil engineer Gustave Eiffel (who became the president), alongside Joseph Vallot, Alfred Besnier, and Léon Gaumont. When Gustave Eiffel was implicated in the political and financial scandal regarding the failed construction of the Panama Canal, the company was named after Gaumont, who was thirty years Eiffel's junior.[25] The fact that so many well-known engineers, physicists, scientists, writers and inventors were connected to Alice Guy-Blaché, either through her work or personally, meant that she was at the vanguard of the social, industrial, and scientific thinking of her day. Her being a trailblazer was also confirmed by her foreseeing the possibilities of film technology

[21] See P.V. DUTTON, *Origins of the French Welfare State: The Struggle for Social Reform in France*, 1914-1947, Cambridge, CUP, 2002, p. 43.

[22] See A. GUY-BLACHÉ, *The Memoirs of Alice Guy Blaché*, p. 11.

[23] D. CARDON and L. LIBBRECHT (trans.), "Editorial", *Réseaux. The French Journal of Communication*, 6 (2), 1998, Tools for Communication and Work, pp. 125-28.

[24] A. GUY-BLACHÉ, *The Memoirs of Alice Guy Blaché*, p. 7.

[25] See "Panama Scandal in Court; The Trials of the Accused Men To Begin To-Day", 10 January 1893, *The New York Times Archives*, https://www.nytimes.com/1893/01/10/archives/panama-scandal-in-court-the-trials-of-the-accused-men-to-begin.html (last accessed on 3 December 2019).

to tell stories. Her first film, *La Fée aux Choux*, is a birth story that metaphorically reflects the dawning of an art medium and industry, with Guy-Blaché 'assisting' in the birth itself. By using humour and satire, this seminal narrative film can be interpreted as an affirmation of life whilst simultaneously focusing on the inequality of the sexes.

3. La Fée aux Choux*, or* The Cabbage Fairy

Our considerations might start with a direct comment by the French filmmaker:

Gathering my courage, I timidly proposed to Gaumont that I might write one or two little scenes and have a few friends perform in them. If the future development of motion pictures had been foreseen at this time, I should never have obtained his consent. My youth, my inexperience, my sex, all conspired against me. I did receive permission, however, on the express condition that this would not interfere with my secretarial duties.[26]

In order to shoot *La Fée aux Choux*, Guy-Blaché first spent her working day at the office in the centre of Paris, and then took the trolleybus to get to the laboratory on the outskirts of Paris and concentrate on her film. After staying four hours in the laboratory, she returned to the office at 4:30 p.m. and handled administrative matters there until 10:00 or 11:00 at night.[27] The film was so successful that it sold eighty copies and had to be remade at least twice, because the original prints disintegrated owing to celluloid's high flammability.

Projection was the major problem at the beginning, so much so that there was a race between Gaumont, Lumière, and Pathé; according to Guy-Blaché, this led to shenanigans between the companies with appropriation of discoveries and techniques accepted as fair game. The first narrative film ever made was likely to have been shot by means of a 60 mm camera; Gaumont, however, would quickly shift to the more functional 35 mm Lumière camera. Astonishingly, such freshly made films found their way to Melbourne (Australia), which in the late 19th century was known as the 'Paris of the South', with the introduction of electricity and its enthusiastic embracing of all things French. In 1896, at the Athenaeum Theatre, the first films are said to have been screened,[28] and there is every likelihood that *The Cabbage Fairy* was one of those pioneering productions.

La Fée aux Choux historically puts woman at the centre of her own story, both in front of the camera and behind it, thereby redefining the feminine. Guy-Blaché successfully assumed the feminine role by "convert[ing] a form of subordination into an affirmation"; in so doing, she played with the concept of nemesis as theorised by Luce Irigaray, and thus recovered her discursively exploited place while resisting any straightforward reduction to it. In Irigaray's words:

There is, in an initial phase, perhaps only one "path", the one historically assigned to the feminine: that of *mimicry*. One must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means already to convert a

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[26] Guy-Blaché's comment is quoted by J.M. Bean and D. Negra, *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*, Durham, Duke U.P., 2002, p. 105.

[27] This reconstruction is given in *The Lost Garden: The Life and Cinema of Alice Guy-Blaché*, Documentary Film, Dir. M. Lepage, Prod. J. Beaudet, 53", National Film Board of Canada, Montreal, 1995.

[28] See "Melbourne Athenaeum Archives", http://www.mahistory.org.au/ (last accessed on 3 September 2019).

form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it. Whereas a direct feminine challenge to this condition means demanding to speak as a (masculine) "subject", that is, it means to postulate a relation to the intelligible that would maintain sexual indifference. To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to resubmit her self – inasmuch as she is on the side of "perceptible", of "matter" to "ideas", in particular to ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but so as to make "visible", by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language. It also means "to unveil" the fact that, if women are such good mimics, it is because they are not simply reabsorbed in this function.[29]

It was no accident that Guy-Blaché chose to tell her sardonic tale of procreation in a garden of cabbages: as we have already seen, her first job was as an assistant to her mother in the care of young women and their children at the Mutualité maternelle. This afforded her an understanding of the diseases and ailments that babies and mothers endured and of the serious challenges faced by pregnant working women. In the film, the notion of procreation bringing the world into ordered existence via the act of giving birth is critically investigated through zeroing in on the absurdity of babies being born under the leaves of cabbages. As a matter of fact, Guy-Blaché meant to heighten the reality of women's contribution as life-givers. The extent to which her message successfully embraced the idea of 'mimesis' is testified to by an article appearing in a French newspaper on July 30, 1896, where the film was assessed as a "chaste fiction of children born under the cabbages in a wonderfully framed chromo landscape".[30] The fact that *La Fée aux Choux* was described as a "chaste" film, meaning that it was pure, unsullied and sinless, precipitated in the audience a magnification of the folkloric legend according to which babies are born from the leaves of cabbages. At a deeper level, though, this brought with itself sexual overtones, an unspoken unveiling of the reality that women were vital and visible by an effect of playful repetition. Women, the film messaged, might well be 'sinful' because sex was a necessity for reproduction.

This was a time when women in France, like women all over the world, had basically few rights; it was only in 1944 that, during Charles de Gaulle's government in exile, French women were finally allowed the suffrage. It had been a long, hard-fought struggle, and, via her leadership in a new communication medium, Guy-Blaché was in the forefront of it. She was clearly a feminist, and her understanding of a woman's difficulty living and working in society, and of the necessity for equality, was to find expression in *Les Résultats du féminisme* (1906, *The Results of Feminism*), one of her most innovative films.

This sardonic take on the life of women – specifically in France, but resonating with audiences worldwide, as far away as Australia – shrewdly and skilfully 'educated' the viewing public about the female question. By cuttingly exploring women's unfair position in society, Guy-Blaché exposed the depth of the inequality between the sexes. This she did with sarcastic humour, guaranteeing audiences immersion into her revolutionary assertion that women should be equal to men.

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[29] L. IRIGARAY, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, p. 76.
[30] *Gil Blas*, 30 July 1896, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alice_Guy-Blach%C3%A9 (last accessed on 3 September 2019).

4. *Early Technology and Film*

> There is nothing connected with the staging of a motion pic-
> ture that a woman cannot do as easily as a man.
>
> A. GUY-BLACHÉ

Technology proved pivotal for the film industry. A crucial discovery was celluloid, a first type of plastic created by the Hyatt brothers in New Jersey in 1869 and distributed in France by the French celluloid company in 1876. Prior to this discovery, glass or metal had been used for photographic reproduction, and the possibility for images to be impressed on a continuous plastic substance now allowed one to focus upon the process of projection. In those days, patents for film equipment were in their infancy, too: the phonoscope, for instance, was patented in 1891 by Georges Demenÿ. Rejected by the Lumière brothers, it was bought by Léon Gaumont and became the basis for the Gaumont 60 mm camera; it was also called the 'chronophotographe' and, as mentioned above, is believed to be the camera utilised by Guy-Blaché in the *The Cabbage Fairy*. A year later, Gaumont switched to the more marketable Lumière/Edison 35 mm camera.

The first films were produced to study motion, with a main focus lying in the so-called 'realistic reproduction' of life and in solving the mechanical problems that concerned the equipment. In other words, the intended sale product revolved around the appliances for making and projecting films, while the potentiality of the equipment itself for entertainment purposes had not been fully realised yet. Indeed, there was no film industry for the purpose of entertainment and Alice Guy-Blaché was the first to harness this potentiality, shifting away from the hardware mechanics or the selling focus and towards the arena of a cinema conceived for amusement and education.

It is worth remembering that this was the time of peak technological inventions with parallels between cinema knowledge and aeronautical research, to the point that the same people were involved in the development of both.[31] The environment for entertainment had already been established to some degree thanks to the 'Magic Lantern', or 'Stereopticon events' in Europe, America, and Australia. These performances attracted huge crowds, with the Stereopticon industry thriving from the 1840s to 1903 and also involving the first woman in the world to stand for political power, viz. Australian Vida Goldstein.[32] Drawing in huge crowds, the Stereopticon experience prepared audiences for the burgeoning cultural phenomenon of 'going to the movies'. People familiarised with the concept of intervals and there was a collective willingness and acceptance to meet in enclosed places for the purpose of viewing light-sourced entertainment. Expressions such as 'in the limelight' originate from this time, as lime was used as a light source for Stereopticon projections.[33] An added part of the excitement often consisted in the blowing up of the projection machine.

Initially working independently, Alice Guy-Blaché was later supplied with extensive stage equipment that copycatted operatic-stage requirements along with an "enormous

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[31] See S. DURANT, "Gustave Eiffel: Aerodynamic Experiments 1903-1921", *Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers – Engineering History and Heritage*, 166 (4), November 2013, pp. 227-35.

[32] For an in-depth analysis of this social reformer and suffragette, see K. BUCZYNSKI-LEE, *Mourning Becomes Electric: Vida Goldstein Takes on Politics and* When Vida Met the President: *A Documentary Film Script*, Master's Research Thesis, Film School, Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne, Australia, 2010.

[33] See A. GUY-BLACHÉ, *The Memoirs of Alice Guy Blaché*, p. 39.

glass cage freezing in winter and burning in summer"; besides, "to remedy the frequent absence of sunlight, two heavy scaffolds had been constructed supporting twenty-four lamps of thirty amperes which caused us bad electric insulation".[34] By 1896, the artistic footprint for film had been provided by opera and, although Guy-Blaché recognised that the 'opera model' might scarcely be realistic in that it was incompatible with the mechanics of the filmic medium, she nonetheless took what was workable.

Opera included flying bridges, slanted floorboards and trapdoors, which in themselves hardly allowed for the flexibility required by filmmaking. She therefore created scenarios that could reflect the life and condition of the people surrounding her, in a transformation that dialogued with a growing understanding of tuberculosis. From one of her most operatic films about the disease – *Esmeralda* (1905), the earliest filmic adaptation of Victor Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris* – to *Falling Leaves* (1912), Guy-Blaché endeavoured to explore the impact of this illness in the arts and society.

5. *Artistic Mirrors vs a Factual Appraisal of Tuberculosis*

Briefly focusing our attention again on Puccini's *La bohème*, it is notable that, although consumptive Mimì is surrounded by a philosopher, a poet, a painter, a musician, and a singer, none of these wise truth-seekers has an explanation for her death. It is as if Puccini could do nothing but depict a hopeless situation where neither the arts, nor science were able to offer solace to the dying loved ones left behind. In the moments before her passing, Rodolfo tells Mimì that she is "beautiful as the dawn". "You've mistaken the image", she corrects him, "You should have said, beautiful as the sunset" (Act IV). The heartbreak and pain caused by such deaths were memorialised not just in opera and literature, but also in painting.

When making her way each day by trolleybus to the Gaumont studios in Paris, Alice Guy-Blaché quite possibly passed the workplace of a young man residing in St Cloud and intent on producing paintings about a subject that haunted him. These works converged on a scene that was shot through with dreary emotions being experienced all over Paris, Europe and America at the time, and which memorialised dying through consumption, or tuberculosis. The reference is to Edvard Munch's *The Sick Child* series (1885-1926), which recorded the moment before the death of his sister Sophie, with grieving Aunt Karen at her bedside. Munch's family had been devastated by tuberculosis: his mother had died of the illness when he was very young and the same doom lay in wait for his older sister. Munch was clearly traumatised and racked with a myriad of emotions (from desolation to suffering and self-reproach), which were to powerfully transpire in his paintings, one of them dating back to 1896, the very year *La Fée aux Choux* was released. Munch probably suffered from a sort of 'survival syndrome' that triggered the channelling of his creative energy towards the exploration of a theme he would return to throughout his whole life. Indeed, he produced six related paintings along with a number of lithographs, dry points and etchings for over thirty years, actually bringing forth a "soul painting".[35] He undoubtedly instilled intense emotions and feelings within such visual representations, which were

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[34] *Ibidem*, p. 33.
[35] S. PRIDEAUX, *Edvard Munch: Behind the Scream*, New Haven and London, Yale U.P., 2005, p. 83.

rich in metaphoric meaning and thus reinforced the connection between artistic endeavour and the nightmare of tuberculosis.

Importantly, however, the last decades of the 19th century also saw a cultural shift whereby the romantic notion of the illness began to be regarded disapprovingly and even with revulsion. Coming to the fore was a lag between artists and public perception, as if it were no longer acceptable for the public to 'romanticise' tuberculosis (added to this was the fact that TB tended to be manifestly associated with poverty).[36] In sum, the evolving understanding of *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* was bound to foster a different kind of relation between the arts and science and pave the way for a more conscious familiarisation with the illness.

6. *Tuberculosis and Metaphor: Consumption Considered as an 'Essential Requirement' for Artistic Manifestations*

> I could not have accepted as a lyrical poet anyone weighing more than ninety-nine pounds.
>
> T. GAUTIER

When looking back at the Romantic period, one notices how consumption was generally believed to be linked to poetic and aesthetic qualities. The central metaphor for consumption in the 19th century stemmed from the idea that the phthisic body, as it was called, was consumed, devoured and overcome from within by the person's passions (as P.B. Shelley famously wrote in *Adonais*, VI, l. 53, the bloom's petals "died on the promise of the fruit"). Edgar Allan Poe described his young wife Virginia, who had tuberculosis, as being "delicately, morbidly angelic" and remembered how in 1842, while they were having dinner, she had a sudden coughing fit followed by haemoptysis, as "suddenly she stopped, clutched her throat and a wave of crimson blood ran down her breast […]. It rendered her even more ethereal".[37] In Alexandre Dumas's phrasing, "it was the fashion to suffer from the lungs; everybody was consumptive, poets especially; it was good form to spit blood after any emotion that was at all sensational, and to die before reaching the age of 30".[38]

Individuals affected by the disease went through severe weight loss owing to an inability to eat; blood filled their lungs and gave rise to a 'fashionable' wane look. The consequences of blood-filled lungs resulted in shortness of breath, paroxysmal cough and fatigue, and all these characteristics were figuratively transposed onto the stage as well as in literature, music, and film. There was a well-defined linguistic and performative codification associated

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[36] It is interesting to point out that, among contemporary critics, Susan Sontag perceives a continuation up until the present with what she describes as the "cult of thinness", a sort of disconnection between the "reality" of dying from a disease and the level of "appearance". While the latter is acceptable, the sheer portrayal of a sombre reality turns out to be unacceptable. See S. SONTAG, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989.

[37] See H. ALLEN, *Israfel: The Life and Times of Edgar Allan Poe*, New York, George H. Doran, 1926, Vol. II, p. 519.

[38] For a recent, illuminating investigation of these aspects see K. LOUGHEED, *Catching Breath: The Making and Unmaking of Tuberculosis*, London, Bloomsbury, 2017.

with the disease, to the extent that, when such a code was not adhered to, artistic transpositions were likely to result in public outcry and derision.

A case in point is the 1853 *première* of Giuseppe Verdi's *La traviata* – based on a play adapted from Alexandre Dumas *fils*'s novel *La Dame aux camélias* (1848) – with curvaceous soprano Fanny Salvini-Donatelli playing the consumptive. Since she did not fit the collective understanding of the slender, sallow figure commonly associated with consumptives, the tragedy eventually dwindled to comedy at its first performance in Venice, with the audience breaking out into laughter when Violetta was told she had only hours to live. Differently put, for the 19th-century audiences Salvini-Donatelli did not have what Susan Sontag calls the "manner of appearing".[39] She was perceived as vulgar, her plumpness suggesting that she whole-heartedly enjoyed her food: in her impersonation, she could not possibly have been consumptive and on the verge of death. Again, as underlined by Sontag:

Consumption was understood as a manner of appearing, and that appearance became a staple of nineteenth-century manners. It became rude to eat heartily. It was glamorous to look sickly. "Chopin was tubercular at a time when good health was not chic," Camille Saint-Saëns wrote in 1913 […]. Saint-Saëns was right to connect an artist, Chopin, with the most celebrated *femme fatale* of the period, who did a great deal to popularize the tubercular look. The TB-influenced idea of the body was a new model for aristocratic looks – at a moment when aristocracy stops being a matter of power, and starts being mainly a matter of image. ("One can never be too rich. One can never be too thin," the Duchess of Windsor once said.) Indeed, the romanticizing of TB is the first widespread example of that distinctively modern activity, promoting the self as an image. The tubercular look had to be considered attractive once it came to be considered a mark of distinction, of breeding. "I cough continually!" Marie Bashkirtsev wrote in the once widely read *Journal*, which was published, after her death at twenty-four, in 1887. "But for a wonder, far from making me look ugly, this gives me an air of languor that is very becoming." What was once the fashion for aristocratic *femmes fatales* and aspiring young artists became, eventually, the province of fashion as such. Twentieth-century women's fashions (with their cult of thinness) are the last stronghold of the metaphors associated with the romanticizing of TB in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[40]

Sontag argues that metaphors used to describe illness risk legitimising the false notion that the ailment's cause is to be found in an inward process of 'repressed passion', as though the affected person were responsible for the disease itself. Central to her thesis is that metaphors associated with illness tend to discourage, silence and blame patients, therefore proving detrimental to wellness. This continues to be a matter of debate, as testified to by, among others, Elena Semino's book *Metaphor in Discourse*, where it is claimed that metaphor is indeed essential to human communication.[41] And whilst Sontag strongly argued against the resort to metaphor conjoined with illness, nowadays metaphors still underpin communication about infection globally. This is illustrated by how President Trump and his Surgeon General pictured tackling the COVID-19 pandemic in the USA in terms of a "Pearl Harbour moment",[42] or Queen Elizabeth II's strong ap-

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[39] S. SONTAG, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*, p. 57.
[40] *Ibidem*.
[41] See E. SEMINO, *Metaphor in Discourse*, Cambridge, CUP, 2008.
[42] "Americans Warned of 'Pearl Harbor Moment' as Trump Tells Parts of the Nation to Brace for 'Peak'", *Washington Post*, 5 April 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/04/05/coronavirus-latest-news/ (last accessed on 10 April 2020).

peal to nationalistic sentiments in her statement "We will meet again" and "succeed in fight".[43]

Thus metaphor seems to be essential in the characterisation of diseases and responses to them. Just as tuberculosis isolated the individual from society, so does COVID-19: the introduction of safe distancing, mask-wearing and lockdown measures in many ways parallels the 19th-century global understanding that tuberculosis was a contagion. The first successful remedy against TB consisted in a sanatorium-based cure, contemplated for the first time in Hermann Brehmer's doctoral dissertation *Tuberculosis is a Curable Disease* (1854). This accelerated the 'industry of sanatoriums' across Europe, including visits by poets, artists and aristocrats to a number of sought-after spa destinations in the continent (such as Bagni di Lucca, Italy). Pauline Bonaparte (Napoleon's sister), Elizabeth Barrett Browning and many others flocked to the continent in a desire for cure and artistic inspiration. Gradually there was a decline in tuberculosis cases, despite there being no pharmaceutical treatment yet. It was not until 1944 that a remedy was found, although there continued to be a notion that artistic activity necessitated the 'tuberculosis illness', so much so that the alleged decadence in the arts was linked to a corresponding decrease in tuberculosis cases.

Film, the newest of art forms, can be said to have taken up from where Puccini's *La bohème* left off. In 1911, the *Moving Picture News* wrote that Alice Guy-Blaché, "the first female filmmaker in history, was a 'fine example of what a woman can do if given a square chance in life'".[44] If still in the operatic manner, her *Girl in the Armchair* (1912) further testified to the perspectives opened up by this bright female pioneer. The film tells of a girl who, while lying in an armchair, overhears that her arranged marital spouse has stolen a sum of money for gambling purposes. Being individually wealthy, the betrothed girl decides to cover up the theft and pay the money back with her own. Intriguingly, this circumstance coincides with Alice Guy-Blaché's efforts to support her husband, Herbert Blaché, who had worked as her camera assistant in Paris and accompanied her as a translator to Germany, with a view to promoting moving pictures. Prior to her marriage in 1907, she had been the French head of production; soon after she announced that she was to marry, Gaumont sent the couple to the United States and appointed Herbert as head of the company there, since married women were customarily discouraged from work.

However, in 1910, Alice managed to set up her own moving-picture industry, named 'Solax Film', which, over a short period of time, would become the biggest film company in the East Coast of the United States. 'Be Natural', the slogan associated with her studios, inculcated the spirit of a method of directing that was part and parcel of her huge success. In 1912, the *New York Clipper* weekly quoted her as saying: "I have produced some of the biggest productions ever released by a motion picture company".[45]

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[43] "Coronavirus: Queen Tells UK 'We Will Succeed in Fight'", 5 April 2020, *BBC*, https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-52176222 (last accessed on 10 April 2020).

[44] See A. MCMAHAN, "Alice Guy: Overlooked No More", 23 September 2019, https://aliceguyblache.com/news/alice-guy-overlooked-no-more (last accessed on 28 November 2020). Needless to say, that kind of chance was only allowed to women when male interpretation saw no threat (either financial or political). As the author wrote in her *Memoirs*, if "the future development of motion pictures had been foreseen at this time, I should never have obtained [a man's] consent".

[45] See again A. MCMAHAN, "Alice Guy: Overlooked No More".

7. Falling Leaves *Between Opera and Medical Advancement*

Falling Leaves was praised by the *New York Dramatic Mirror* as a film "developed and played with a compelling naturalness", focusing on a "captivating little girl" who sets out to "thwart fate when it decreed that her sister should die of consumption when the leaves had all fallen".[46] Guy-Blaché's knowledge about filmmaking, gained in France over an eleven-year period, meant that her understanding was thorough and had been sharpened by her place within the industry from the inception. Her working experience in a man's domain had provided her with the necessary skills to assert her role as a leading light in the burgeoning film industry.

While taking her cue from one of O. Henry's short stories,[47] she also established a symbolic link between this film and Robert Koch's investigation and discoveries related to tuberculosis, for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1905. Indeed, the singling out of the TB bacterium was pivotal for her filmic rendition, which fulfilled the role of both story-telling and factual-knowledge reporting. In other words, *Falling Leaves* dialogued with an updated, scientific understanding of tuberculosis that was committed to finding a viable cure, and, by means of its artistic representation, it strengthened the idea that women hit by this illness should live, rather than tragically pass away. Guy-Blaché had a keen interest in science and tried to keep abreast with medical developments, as also confirmed by her early camera work. Describing how she "often helped [director of the institute Francois Frank] photograph ataxic persons, the respiration of animals with hearts laid open and frogs which I marked with white flags before registering their palpitations",[48] she demonstrated a passion that made it natural for her to scientifically opine in her films, and specifically in *Falling Leaves.*

On yet another level, some elements underpinning Puccini's *La bohème* can be found again in *Falling Leaves*, which partially endorsed the 19th-century view of consumption and its emotionally-laden operatic interpretation. Both *La bohème* and *Falling Leaves* cast the central female figure as a young, slender and pale woman assailed by weakness and a dainty cough. In Puccini's work, Mimì sings of her love of "all things that have gentle magic, that talk of love, of spring", the "things called poetry". *Falling Leaves* similarly depicts the protagonist as willowy and artistic (she attempts to play the piano), but, whereas Mimì is hopelessly doomed, the film's tragic heroine is saved from death thanks to both scientific intervention and a touch of the magical by her little sister Trixy. Guy-Blaché thus introduces a paradigm shift that hinges on a surviving heroine who, by replacing the stereotype of the young pale creature portrayed in opera and literature, leaves room for a more robust and resilient kind of woman. This character, one might argue, is willing to survive just as the filmmaker herself was determined to survive in her business enterprise.[49]

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[46] "Review of *Falling Leaves*", *New York Dramatic Mirror*, 67 (1735), 20 March 1912, p. 32, https://fultonhistory.com (last accessed on 28 November 2020).

[47] See O. Henry (William Sydney Porter), "The Last Leaf", in Id., *The Trimmed Lamp, and Other Stories of the Four Million*, New York, McClure, Phillips, 1907, pp. 198-208.

[48] A. Guy-Blaché, *The Memoirs of Alice Guy Blaché*, p. 18.

[49] Guy-Blaché's determination is suggested by various factors and circumstances, such as when, pregnant with her second child, she built a studio in Fort Lee, New Jersey, completing one to two films per week. By pushing the boundaries, she innovatively honed the medium. Notably, her film *A Fool and His Money* (1912), only recently discovered in a Sunday junk market in the USA, was the first to show an all African-American cast.

Falling Leaves departs from opera's commonplaces in other ways, too. If operatic young women were assumed to die or commit suicide for the sake of love, Guy-Blaché's new heroine treads a rosier path. A different context comes into view as the bacterial doctor not only saves the young pale patient from an artistically extolled past, but also serves her. This film can therefore be said to make retribution for the wrongs suffered by a whole family of foredoomed consumptive heroines. In 1912, it was time for a less prejudiced assessment of the consumptive patient's condition and life expectancy, and the French director's imagined interpretation of a cure for tuberculosis by a bacteriologist was closer in fact to the three operas of the preceding century.

Unfortunately, however, more time was necessary for this ray of hope to pierce the darkness, to the extent that, in real life, Little Trixy's sister would have succumbed. Indeed, the enthusiasm fuelled at the turn of the 20th century by Robert Koch's identification of *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* was bound to wane when the German researcher's attempt at introducing a tuberculin-based treatment did not prove effective. It was only in 1949 that a compound against consumption would be discovered: this was 'streptomycin', an antibiotic classified by Jewish-American biochemist and microbiologist Selman Abraham Waksman (1888-1973), who focused his studies on soil microbes. In 1952, like Koch before him, Waksman received the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine.

8. *Conclusion: Future Cures to Be Found in Garden Soil?*

Alice Guy-Blaché's life could in its own way be defined as 'operatic', since it continued to be theatrical and intense. After deciding to concentrate on production, she passed on the financial side of the company to her husband Herbert, who, however, was unable to adopt successful strategies for the sales of her films, particularly with regard to *The Lure* (1914). Initially banned, this film was based on the homonymous 1913 controversial play by American writer George Scarborough, and it cautioned about white slavery by telling a sympathetic story of how young women were lured into prostitution.[50] While Herbert Blaché was persuaded that it was near worthless, that film actually went on to make a fortune for the lucky buyer.

Leaving his wife bankrupt and with two dependent children, Herbert moved to California along with the lead actress and set up his own company. Sadly, Alice was now forced to work under his direction and found herself in a traumatic predicament. When she decided to return to France with her children, work for her in the film industry was hopeless, and she consequently resorted to writing children stories for newspapers to make ends meet.[51]

In her pathbreaking productions, Guy-Blaché also went to great lengths to portray 'naturalness' by humanely depicting immigrants from Eastern Europe and placing them in outdoor locations, as is the case with *Making an American Citizen* (1912). This film's sense of humanity toward poor immigrants is hard to find in the United States' establishment of our days, as one gathers from "Trump Migrant Separation Policy: Children 'In Cages' in Texas", 18 June 2018, *BBC News*, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-44518942 (last accessed on 3 September 2019).

[50] See R. ABEL (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, London and New York, Routledge, 2005, p. 693.

[51] See "Nature to Lead Fight Against Tuberculosis", 24 August 2018, *UQ News*, The University of Queensland, Australia, https://www.uq.edu.au/news/article/2018/08/nature-lead-fight-against-tuberculosis (last accessed on 3 September 2019).

A still photograph from that time sees her seated in a garden, as if that backdrop were a metaphor for a now frozen existence in a filmic shot about her life. Interestingly, in Canadian Marquise Lepage's recent documentary *The Lost Garden: The Life and Cinema of Alice Guy-Blaché* (1995), Alice's lifetime achievements are illustrated by her own words from interviews and with an emphasis on the garden theme, which she had recurrently equated with her very place in the film industry.

Both the garden of cabbages in *La Fée aux Choux* and the autumnal one in *Falling Leaves* appear as environments conjoined with the strength and continuity of life. For its part, consumption, or TB, still represents a major problem in various areas of the world, being the leading cause of death due to a single bacterium. The incidence of multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis is of concern to all medical practitioners and researchers in the field. Approximately 10 million cases of tuberculosis are diagnosed annually, with the disease causing 1.7 million deaths every year.

What is more, owing to the fact that the antibiotics used for treating the infection have serious, toxic side effects, a search for alternatives has led medical directions to turn to gardens for possible answers. Specifically, the research has centred on the soil of gardens and the millions of bacteria thriving there. Such minuscule, one-celled organisms are absolutely essential to the garden environment, performing important services related to water dynamics, nutrient cycling, and disease suppression. A mere teaspoon of soil generally contains between 100 million and 1 billion of these organisms. With reference to the present article, it is worth underlining that, in our days, Professor Antje Blumenthal from the University of Queensland has identified a compound naturally made by soil bacteria, which has been found to be effective against tuberculosis. Added to this major advancement is another scientific breakthrough linked to the vegetable world, namely to Persian shallots (*Allium stipitatum*), which seem to have an enormous potential for antibiotic assistance. Indeed, it has been proven that the synthesised active substances present in the bulb of the Persian shallot can inhibit the growth of tuberculosis by 99.9 percent.[52]

In the upshot, one might surmise that Guy-Blaché's garden of *Falling Leaves*, with its millions of bacteria at its roots, quite possibly holds scientific secrets yet to be discovered. From beneath the earth in the gardens, as John Keats famously eulogised in his poem "Fairy Song", the "flower will bloom another year": one must not weep, because "young Buds sleep in the root's white core".[53]

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[52] See "Persian Shallot 'Could Help Fight TB Antibiotic Resistance'", 20 January 2018, *BBC News*, https://www.bbc.com/news/health-42751095 (last accessed on 25 March 2020).

[53] J. KEATS, "Fairy Song", ll. 1-4, https://internetpoem.com/john-keats/fairy-song-poem/ (last accessed on 25 March 2020).

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Marco Canani

Rambles in the Tuscan Fields:
Janet Ross's and Vernon Lee's Sketches of Places

Abstract: Between the mid-nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries Tuscany was home to an intellectually vibrant Anglo-American community. Unsurprisingly, the region was the subject of a number of travelogues by English and American 'expatriates', that is, observing subjects whose gaze is simultaneously placed within and without the landscape and the culture that they explore. This article examines the work of British-born, expatriate writers Janet Ross and Vernon Lee, and argues that their travel memoirs represent Tuscan landscapes as a blotting paper conflating culture and the environment. Ross's *Italian Sketches* (1887) and *Old Florence and Modern Tuscany* (1904) and Lee's *The Enchanted Woods* (1905) and *The Tower of the Mirrors* (1914) appropriate the conventions of visual and verbal sketches to blur the distinction between environment and landscape on the one hand, and between objective descriptions and subjective impressions on the other. In so doing, Ross's and Lee's representations of Tuscan landscapes rest on an imbrication of visual and verbal elements that foreground the interplay of individual and cultural memory.

Keywords: Anglo-Italian Studies. Janet Ross. Landscape. Sketch. Cultural Memory.

Between the mid-eighteenth and the early twentieth centuries, an intellectually vibrant Anglo-American community found in Florence and its surroundings a modern-day arcadia. Fascinated with the hills nesting the cradle of the Italian Renaissance, British and American expatriates began to settle in the area in the 1840s, forming a colony that would thrive until at least World War II. According to consular estimates, in 1910 Florence and its neighbouring towns hosted about 35,000 British citizens. Their presence, as Ben Downing observes, was an integral "part of the texture of the city",[1] and the works of writers such as John Ruskin, D.H. Lawrence, E.M. Forster, and Edith Wharton certainly provide a fresco of their experience of Tuscany. Forster, for instance, first visited Florence with his mother in 1901, and their lodgings at the Pensione Simi inspired the ruthless criticism of British and American travellers in *A Room with a View* (1908). "If you will not think me rude", Mr Eager tells Miss Honeychurch during a trip to Fiesole, "*we residents* sometimes pity *you tourists* not a little" for "living herded together in pensions or hotels, quite unconscious of anything that is outside Baedeker".[2] Forster only temporarily relocated to Florence as part of an extensive tour of Italy, and as such he may not be considered a Florentine 'resident'. Nevertheless, underlying his reproaching remarks is the distinction between 'tourists' and 'expatriates' as two distinct observing subjects endowed with different perspectives and, I would add, different gazes.

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[1] B. Downing, *Queen Bee of Tuscany: The Redoubtable Janet Ross*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013, pp. 5-6; on the Anglo-Florentine community see also B. Roeck, *Florence 1900: The Quest for Arcadia*, New Haven and London, Yale U.P., 2009.

[2] E.M. Forster, *A Room with a View*, ed. M. Bradbury, New York and London, Penguin, 2000, p. 56.

   Grounded in shared rituals and leading to the commodification of cultural heritage, the "tourist gaze" is traditionally defined as a social practice whose origin dates to the rise of mass tourism in industrial Britain. According to John Urray's notable theorisation, the gaze of the tourist rests on "culturally specific notions of what is extraordinary", a category that identifies what deserves to be seen. The tourist gaze, in other words, is at once inclusive and exclusive, directed to specific "features of landscape and townscape which separate them off from everyday experience".[3] As such it determines – as Forster's ironical reference to Baedeker suggests – what should be observed and how. Urray does not distinguish between 'tourists' and 'expatriates', but his definition of the "tourist gaze" as a cultural practice is inherently connected to the status of the tourist as a short-term visitor to a place. Consequently, the "tourist gaze" may be opposed to what I term here the "expatriate gaze", that is, the perspective of an observing subject who is simultaneously placed within and without the culture he or she observes, and whose experience of the place to which he or she relocates is not temporary.

   This distinction interestingly reverberates in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century literary representations of Tuscany.[4] The period saw the development of the Anglo-Tuscan community that hosted writers and intellectuals such as Janet Ross, Vernon Lee, Bernard Berenson, Iris Origo, and Ouida, but it also bears witness to a new sensitivity to the Tuscan countryside as opposed to the historical heritage of Florence and Siena. The 1903 edition of *Baedeker's Central Italy*, for example, only recommended the Casentino Valley as a rural place worth visiting in the region.[5] Against this trend, the writings of the British-born, Florentine residents Janet Ross (1842-1927) and Vernon Lee (1856-1935) reveal a different perspective, which is inherently linked to their gaze as expatriates.

   Née Duff Gordon, Janet Ross was raised in an intellectually stimulant London environment. Victorian writers such as Thomas Carlyle, William Makepeace Thackeray, and Alfred Tennyson were regular visitors to her parents' house at Westminster, and it was Charles Dickens, as Ross recalled in her autobiography, that "encouraged" her early reading interests.[6] After marrying the banker Henry Ross in 1860, the couple moved to Cairo, where they lived for six years before relocating to Europe in 1867. The Rosses had planned to settle in France, but they eventually moved to Florence, first in the Lungarno and then on the hills of Coverciano, where they bought the Villa di Poggio Gherardo in 1888. With its *podere*, Poggio Gherardo was a historical site, traditionally identified with the "palagio"

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   [3] J. URRAY and J. LARSEN, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*, Los Angeles, Sage, 2011, pp. 75, 2.
   [4] Although they do not explicitly distinguish between 'tourists' and 'expatriates', David Leavitt and Mark Mitchell arguably point to the same contrast in the anthology *Italian Pleasures* (1996). By alternating their own remarks with excerpts from canonical writers, they mean to provide readers with an image of Italy that rectifies common literary stereotypes. In much English and American travel writing, Mitchell claims, "the tendency is either to praise overmuch everything under the Italian sky (which the sky over no other country in the world can match), or to be sour and condescending about the same everything". Against this penchant, Leavitt and Mitchell intended to select texts testifying to "a lived", as opposed to a "visited, Italian life". Not all the authors anthologised in *Italian Pleasures* are in fact expatriates, but the aesthetic sensitivity of writers such as Ruskin, Pater and Wharton arguably raised their gaze above the perspective of the tourist. See M. MITCHELL, "Introduction" to D. LEAVITT and M. MITCHELL, *Italian Pleasures*, London, Fourth Estate, 1996, pp. 2-3.
   [5] B. DOWNING, *Queen Bee of Tuscany*, p. 9.
   [6] J. ROSS, *The Fourth Generation. Reminiscences by Janet Ross*, London, Constable & Company, 1912, pp. 7, 109.

where Boccaccio's pilgrims spend the quarantine in *Decameron*.[7] But Ross's villa soon acquired new historical significance as one of the central sites of Anglo-American Tuscany. When she visited Florence in 1909, the young Virginia Stephen noted in her diary that Ross was a "brusque & imperious" old lady, but she was also "the friend of writers", and embodied the "character of the country side".[8]

Ross's biography – and Woolf's comments – are to a considerable extent reminiscent of Vernon Lee's. *Née* Violet Paget, Lee was born in France to British parents, and after travelling extensively to Switzerland, Germany, and Italy, the Pagets settled in Florence in 1873. In 1889 the family moved to Il Palmerino, the Renaissance villa that was to become a cosmopolitan hub visited by writers such as Edith Wharton, Aldous Huxley, and Henry James. Almost echoing Woolf's remarks on Ross, the American novelist wrote to Edmund Gosse that Lee "was disputatious and paradoxical", but also "a superior talker".[9] In spite of these biographical convergences, Ross's and Lee's interest in Tuscan landscapes has never been viewed as grounded in a similar gaze.[10] Yet both Ross and Lee claim their status – and perspective – as expatriates, which, together with their interest in Tuscan history, art, and folklore, shape their 'sketches' of places. By adopting the sketch as a verbal and visual model for recording their impressions of the Tuscan countryside, and the culture that moulded its landscape over time, Ross's *Italian Sketches* (1887) and *Old Florence and Modern Tuscany* (1904) and Lee's *The Enchanted Woods* (1905) and *The Tower of the Mirrors* (1914) blur the distinction between environment and landscape on the one hand, and between objective descriptions and subjective impressions on the other. Moving from these assumptions, in the first section of this article I explore Ross's and Lee's use of the conventions of the literary sketch with a focus on their conflation of visual and verbal elements. Subsequently, I suggest that the non-linearity and incompleteness inherent to the sketch enable both writers to shift between present and past, and between natural landscapes and places of culture in their representations of Tuscany. Although the fragmentary construction of the sketch gives readers the impression of a discontinuous narrative, Ross's and Lee's process of textual assemblage grants conceptual wholeness to their literary rambles across the Tuscan countryside.

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[7] *Ibidem*, pp. 287-88. This is the passage from *Decameron* that Ross refers to, and which is traditionally associated with Villa di Poggio Gherardo: "Era il detto luogo sopra una piccola montagnetta, da ogni parte lontano alquanto alle nostre strade, di varii albuscelli e piante tutte di verdi fronde ripiene piacevole a riguardare; in sul colmo della quale era un palagio con bello e gran cortile nel mezzo, e con logge e con sale e con camere, tutte ciascuna verso di sé bellissima e di liete dipinture raguardevole e ornata, con pratelli da torno e con giardini maravigliosi e con pozzi d'acque freschissime e con vòlte piene di preziosi vini: cose più atte a curiosi bevitori che a sobrie e oneste donne. Il quale tutto spazzato, e nelle camere i letti fatti, ed ogni cosa di fiori, quali nella stagione si potevano avere, piena e di giunchi giuncata, la vegnente brigata trovò con suo non poco piacere" (G. BOCCACCIO, *Decameron*, a cura di V. BRANCA, Torino, Einaudi, 2000, p. 20).

[8] V. WOOLF, *A Passionate Apprentice. The Early Journals, 1897-1909*, ed. M.A. LEASKA, San Diego, New York and London, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990, p. 398.

[9] H. JAMES, *Letters: Volume III, 1883-1895*, ed. L. EDEL, Cambridge, MA, The Belknap Press of Harvard U.P., 1980, p. 181. On Lee's cosmopolitan *coterie* see S. CENNI, S. GEOFFROY e E. BIZZOTTO (a cura di), *Violet del Palmerino. Aspetti della cultura cosmopolita nel salotto di Vernon Lee: 1889-1935*, Firenze, Consiglio Regionale della Toscana, 2014.

[10] Albeit specifically focusing on Ross's and Lee's representation of the Florentine landscape, an exception is G. CORSANI, "Visioni vittoriane: il paesaggio fiorentino nelle opere di Janet Ross e Vernon Lee", *Ri-Vista. Ricerche per la progettazione del paesaggio*, 2 (1), 2004, pp. 1-13.

Visual and Verbal Conventions

Ross's *Italian Sketches* was published in 1887 as a collection of articles, most of which had already appeared in the *English Illustrated Magazine*, *Fraser's Magazine*, and *Longman's Magazine*. The book, enriched with illustrations by Carlo Orsi, was followed by an expanded edition, *Old Florence and Modern Tuscany*, in 1904. Ross's first volume includes two chapters devoted to Apulia, which explains the absence of any explicit reference to Tuscany in the title. The word 'sketches', instead, places Ross's work into a well-defined literary genre, which had acquired new dignity as an artistic form in its own right as a result of the late eighteenth-century interest in picturesque beauty and the Romantic cult of spontaneity. In choosing to define her articles on Tuscan landscapes as sketches, Ross thus foregrounds her belief in the visual power of the written word while revealing her attempt at narrative authenticity.

By refusing rhetoricity in the pursuit of immediacy, the sketch, as Richard Sha has convincingly argued, had reached its popularity among Romantic artists, writers, and poets, who sought to reproduce the impression of genuineness typical of preparatory drawings in carefully fabricated 'first drafts'.[11] In the advertisement to *Poetical Sketches* (1783), for example, William Blake claimed that his work was "the production of untutored youth", suggesting that its "irregularities and defects" were also an indirect demonstration of the poet's "originality". Similarly, Robert Hills presented his verbal *Sketches in Flanders and Holland* (1816) as "the errors of an unpracticed pen", and the accompanying plates as drawings still "to be finished".[12] By claiming their status as incomplete works, visual and verbal sketches conform to an aesthetic paradigm consistent with William Wordsworth's plea for spontaneous emotions. Consequently, the literary sketch allows for an impression of authenticity and incompleteness while hiding the writer's attention for details behind an apparent lack of polish.

In the introduction to *Italian Sketches*, Ross makes a similar disclaimer to her readers. She is aware that her "pictures of the Tuscan peasants", which are an integral part of her representation of the landscape, might appear as "flattered and highly coloured".[13] Ross apologises for her excessive characterisation of the *contadini*, which she explains as a result of her long permanence in the Tuscan countryside. In so doing, she constructs her gaze as an expatriate, a long-term resident whose focus is placed, unlike tourists', on both ordinary and extraordinary features of landscapes and places. At the same time, Ross admits to possible technical flaws, to the lack of polish that readers may detect in her portraits of the peasants, but also to the combination of visual and verbal aspects that shape her *Sketches*. This conflation is particularly evident when the landscape is inextricably linked to the human presence. "In Vintaging in Tuscany", for example, she captures the vineyard before and after the grapes are harvested, emphasising the effects of the human action on the environment: "How melancholy the vines looked stripped of their grapes! The glorious white and golden, and pink and deep red bunches had given a beauty to the landscape

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[11] R.C. Sha, *The Visual and Verbal Sketch in British Romanticism*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998, p. 9.

[12] *Ibidem*, p. 5.

[13] J. Ross, *Italian Sketches*, illustrated by C. Orsi, London, Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1887, p. v.

which one did not realise until they were gone, and the poor vines stood bare".[14] Ross's attention to colours and shapes visually evokes the Tuscan landscape between summer and autumn, but it also foregrounds the action of the peasants on the vines. When she focuses on the landscape as a subject in its own right, however, her descriptions are trimmed from excessive details and conform to the aesthetic tenets of the nineteenth-century sketch.

In "The Baths of Casciana in July", Ross presents her memories of the small town as if they were recorded on the spur of the moment. The hamlet of Parlascio offers the perfect viewpoint to capture the picturesque beauty of the Pisan hills, which she registers in the present tense:

To the left Monte Moro, behind which lies Leghorn, stands out black against the sky; and the sea, with here and there a white sail glinting in the sun, stretches far away. Pisa, with the Carrara mountains behind, lies in the soft green plain, and in front is a curious, broken landscape, rounded, water-washed hillocks, each crowned by a grey townlet with its tall campanile; the haze caused by the heat made the whole land look like a large opal. The nearest grey town is Morrona, standing on the peak of a hill, near which, further along the ridge, lies the abbey, now the villa of a rich Livornese. To the far right Volterra rears her weather-beaten towers to the sky, perched on the extreme edge of a high hill like an eagle's nest.[15]

Either visual or verbal, the early nineteenth-century sketch rests on the principle of incompleteness, an aesthetic strategy which aims to resist "the excesses of art" to persuade viewers and readers of its simplicity, originality, and truthfulness.[16] Ross intentionally presents her readers with a visual description concocted as a first draft executed *en plein air*. Leghorn and the Tyrrhenian Sea towards the South-West, and the Carrara mountains in the North, are only slightly hinted at against a fragmented landscape, and so is the medieval townscape of Volterra, which is only briefly compared to a nest perched on a hill. Ross captures the multitude of visual inputs that Casciana and its surroundings offer to her sight, but she renounces reproducing the 'myriad impressions' that her eyes receive. In pictorial terms one might say that she substitutes ample strokes with soft lines, which crystallise her gaze on paper but invite readers to re-process them into the organic whole that can be perceived from the right viewpoint.

Ross's sketch of Casciana captures the picturesqueness of the scenery offered by the Pisan hills, which she reproduces with a maximum of variety and contrast. This combination, as Reverend William Gilpin argued in his *Three Essays* (1792), is a central element of picturesque beauty provided that it is reconciled into a harmonious whole, while Uvedale Price stated in *Essay on the Picturesque* (1794) that "intricacy in the disposition, and variety in the forms, the tints, and the lights and shadows of objects, are the great characteristics of picturesque scenery".[17] Ross's representation of the landscape in "The Baths of Casciana in July" arguably follows these aesthetic principles, and so do other passages from *Italian*

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[14] *Ibidem*, p. 106.
[15] *Ibidem*, pp. 177-78.
[16] R.C. SHA, *The Visual and Verbal Sketch*, pp. 3, 5.
[17] W. GILPIN, *Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty; On Picturesque Travel; and On Sketching Landscape: to which is Added a Poem, On Landscape Painting*, London, Blamire, 1792; U. PRICE, *Essays on the Picturesque, As Compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful*, London, Mawman, 1810, pp. 22-23. On Gilpin and the picturesque see also F. ORESTANO, *Paesaggio e finzione. William Gilpin, il pittoresco, la visibilità nella letteratura inglese*, Milano, Unicopli, 2000.

Sketches. When she observes the road from Lastra a Signa to Malmantile in "A September Day in the Valley of the Arno", she pays the utmost attention to the plants, trees, and flowers that grow in the area. Ross emphasises her familiarity with the place, but she also gives prominence to the visual contrasts produced by the colours of the valley:

The steep hillsides clothed with heather and pines, the cyclamen and the autumn crocus, or colchicum, glowing in the sunlight, the last year's leaves of the Christmas roses, yellow, bright brown, and black, and the shaggy goats climbing among the jutting rocks, formed a picture worthy of the brush of Salvator Rosa. We passed four water-mills, and then, perched on a well-wooded knoll, with jagged rocks and a tangled undergrowth of honeysuckle, heather and brambles, saw the farmhouse of St. Antonio, which must in old times have been a fortress, dominating the valley. It is *picturesque* enough, *all corners*, *angles*, and *arches*, with a grey tower, now the home of numerous pigeons.[18]

Even more relevant for an examination of the aesthetic principles that mould Ross's representations of the Tuscan countryside is the last of Gilpin's *Three Essays*, "On Sketching Landscape". The reverend's first recommendation concerns the need to find a suitable point of view for executing a sketch. At the same time, artists should not aim to reproduce all the details that the eyes perceive. When viewed from the right perspective, the scene may in fact appear pleasantly fragmented. "The ground, which folds awkwardly here", Gilpin explains, "appears to fold more easily there: and that long blank curtain of the castle, which is so unpleasing a circumstance, as you stand on one side, is agreeably broken by a buttress on another".[19] This is also Ross's composite perspective when one sums the multiple viewpoints that direct her gaze in Parlascio – the "curious" appearance of a "broken landscape" complemented by "rounded", regular hillocks, and the contrast between the horizontal and vertical perspectives designed by ridges and edges. In addition, her description of "The Baths of Casciana in July" rests on a process of reduction and allusion that is equally consistent with Gilpin's precepts. After finding the right point of view, the scenery needs to be "properly" reduced to fit the paper. The aesthetics of the sketch is grounded in absence and subtraction, and Gilpin promptly warns artists not to "include too much: it may perhaps be divided more commodiously into two sketches".[20] Sketchers should focus instead on an adequate portion of the landscape, and Ross's description of the view from Parlascio is a compound representation that stitches together separate sketches, each representing a part of the landscape according to where she places her gaze.

The same aesthetic principles guide Ross's representation of the lower Val d'Arno in "Oil-Making in Tuscany", but this time she neatly breaks her sketch into separate parts. The writer gives shape to the visual impressions gathered from a *podere* by first focusing on what she sees in the East: Florence, with its "dark cupolas looming out grandly against the snow-covered hills of Vallombrosa, which rose behind the bright city". Subsequently, she turns to "the fruitful valley of the Arno", hinting at the "glimpses of the river here and there, glistening like silver, and the slender, leafless branches of the willow glowing scarlet and orange as they tossed", like Wordsworth's daffodils, "in the breeze".[21] Ross sketches the Val d'Arno through a series of present participles that freezes her vision in time and

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[18] J. ROSS, *Italian Sketches*, pp. 78-79 (emphasis added).
[19] W. GILPIN, *Three Essays*, p. 63.
[20] *Ibidem*.
[21] J. ROSS, *Italian Sketches*, p. 114.

conveys an impression of immediacy. After some brief remarks on the medieval and early modern history of Lastra a Signa, she resumes her sketch of the valley:

Monte Morello and Monte Ferrato rose behind, while the villas dotted here and there on the dark hillsides gleamed out white in the brilliant sunshine. The picturesque little town of Prato seemed quite close, instead of being twelve miles away, and we could plainly distinguish the beautiful marble cathedral, in which Filippo Lippi worked so well, and inspired his brush with the lovely face of Lucrezia Buti, the young nun who left her cloister at Prato to follow the smooth-tongued painter.[22]

Ross softly sketches the scenario offered by the Val d'Arno, with the Renaissance villas appearing as dots hatching the landscape and the hills as gleams of light. Unlike the first section, she entrusts the description of the valley and the city of Prato to memory. However, her sketch rests not so much on subjective recollections, but rather on cultural memory, embodied in the Renaissance painter Filippo Lippi and his passion for the nun Lucrezia Buti while executing the fresco cycle *Stories of St Stephen and St John the Baptist* at the Duomo of Prato.

The same conflation of verbal and visual elements recurs in Vernon Lee's travel writing, which is indissolubly linked to the idea of the spirit of the place, the "genius loci" to which she devoted various volumes between 1899 and 1925. Lee's first travelogue, *Genius Loci: Notes on Places* (1899), includes her impressions of Italian, French, and German landscapes and places. However, when she visits Touraine, the mere sight of a book abandoned in a ditch brings her memory back to Italy, which she recognises as "the country of my adoption".[23] Like Ross, Lee claims her status – and thus her gaze – as an expatriate, and compares the role of "race" and "language" in determining one's identity. Counterposing culture to nature, Lee states that "race is nothing and language all; for the blood carries only physical resemblance, which is simple and very individual; while the word carries thought, custom, law and prejudice, which are complex and universal".[24] This distinction confirms her cosmopolitan outlook, and her composite, expatriate gaze in observing landscapes and places.

Lee never refers to her impression of landscapes and places as 'sketches'. Nevertheless, the subtitle of her first volume of travel memoirs, *Notes on Places*, alludes to the aesthetic principle of the incomplete, unfinished draft on which sketches rest. In *The Enchanted Woods* and *The Tower of the Mirrors* she avowedly pursues the literary model of the essay, which is the genre that she found most congenial to her writing. However, even when she examines subjects such as Renaissance history, art and culture, she conceives the essay as a porous narrative form that defies rhetoricity in favour of seemingly fragmented remarks. In *Euphorion: Being Studies of the Antique and the Mediæval in the Renaissance* (1884), Lee defines her work as "impressions" based on "currents of thought and feeling", but she also points out that her essays "are not samples, fragments at which one tries one's hand, of some large and methodical scheme of work".[25] The analogy with the sketch is patent, from its calculated want of polish to its claim as a genre in its own right as opposed to a preliminary draft.

[22] *Ibidem*.
[23] V. Lee, *Genius Loci: Notes on Places*, London, Grant Richards, 1899, p. 43.
[24] *Ibidem*, p. 154.
[25] V. Lee, *Euphorion: Being Studies of the Antique and the Mediæval in the Renaissance*, 2 vols, London, Fisher Unwin, 1884, Vol. I, p. 16.

Lee's 'impressions' of Tuscan landscapes are mainly recorded in *The Enchanted Woods* and *The Tower of the Mirrors*. The volumes include her memories of the Maremma and Vallombrosa, Pisa, the Bocca d'Arno, and Viareggio, and this variety of places is already a clear indication of the diverse scenery that she represents. In "A Walk in the Maremma", Lee stresses the importance of finding the right viewpoint for appreciating the beauty of the place, but she also expresses the difficulty encountered in crystallising her visual impressions on the page: "As one rides along, the loveliest landscapes unfurl and furl, in front and behind; they are tantalizing, unclutchable".[26] Lee turns her gaze towards multiple directions, and her sketch foregrounds the biodiversity of the place, be it real or imagined:

I scrambled […] along the banks where spates have filled the lower branches of the leafless elms and rosy-budding aspens with armfuls of dry bramble, clematis-tendril, and reeds; foolish Ophelia-wreaths under the real garlands of ivy, which crown the top; immense dry nests ready for fantastic birds, bigger than the heron who sailed over us at the ford, indeed for birds altogether of Fairyland.[27]

Lee is extremely sensitive to the Tuscan landscape, which she represents through a series of rapid touches embodied here in paratactic sentences separated by semicolons. The writer explicitly commends this minimalist aesthetics in her memories on "The Dockyard of Viareggio", where she claims that "There is an aesthetic virtue, more certainly even than a moral one, in the fact of not *having too much*; short commons stimulating the spirit to extract all the interest and beauty which things themselves contain".[28] Against the dizzy grandeur of the "Grecian hillsides and capes", Lee praises the delight that one feels around Viareggio, "the intimate pleasantness, and even amusement" that is found in its "pale, straight sands, and pale sea barely breaking into white; in the wide streets of little shut-up houses; in the whitish colours of things under the whitish scirocco sky".[29] Again, Lee emphasises the variety and contrast offered by the landscape through short sentences divided by semicolons, as if she were presenting readers with notes taken on site. At times, however, her verbal descriptions appropriate visual codes that are typical of painting. At the end of her excursion in the Maremma, Lee portrays the impending storm by following the effects of the nightlight, bringing to the fore the colours and shades that illuminate the landscape:

As I scrambled along the stream, where the autumn leaves were sprinkled white with snowdrops, the water took rosy and purple stains; and the rainy sky opened blue and moist, surrounded by colossal mounds of white and crimson and inky cumulus. And when I had climbed up the Castle hill and got to its shoulder, behold! a great dark storm was coming up from the sea, filling the shallow valley with smoke. It thundered; and short white lightnings danced above the woods, only one blood-red stain marking the place of the setting sun.[30]

As the use of the first person suggests, Lee often conflates the objective representation of the landscape with her subjective impressions. As she had remarked in an earlier essay, titled "The Lie of the Land. Notes about Landscape" (1897), the individual experience

[26] V. LEE, *The Enchanted Woods, and Other Essays on the Genius of Places*, London, John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1905, p. 165.
    [27] *Ibidem*, p. 166.
    [28] V. LEE, *The Tower of the Mirrors, and Other Essays on the Spirit of Places*, London, John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1914, p. 169.
    [29] *Ibidem*.
    [30] V. LEE, *The Enchanted Woods*, pp. 169-70.

of places acts as a visual filter, making "the real, individual landscape – the landscape one actually sees with the eyes of the body and the eyes of the spirit – *the landscape you cannot describe*".[31] Crucial to this intimate perception of the landscape is the observer's relationship with the "genius loci", which Lee considers a "substance of our heart and mind, a spiritual reality" that is manifest in "the place itself".[32] From this perspective, the representation of the landscape is the result of visual data, filtered by the subjective associations of the observing subject. In *Genius Loci*, Lee's view of the Tuscan Apennine at dusk combines visual perceptions with impressions gathered from other senses, conflating colours with noises and smells:

The mountains gradually disappeared, and the high wooden hills lay folded as if in sleep against the pale sky with its first stars. The dead chestnut leaves rustled under foot, and the song of the torrent, the bell of the little town, alone broke the stillness. With the freshness of southern night, there came from the hill-sides the smell of charcoal-burning, of charring wood, and wet leaves and turf; a smell very peculiar, bitter-sweet, and heady, as of the wine drunk by the creatures of the forest.[33]

More frequently, the associations that Lee develops in her verbal sketches of landscapes and places are not subjective but grounded in cultural memory. This is due to her conception of the "genius loci" as a presence immanent in the land and revealing its history: Lee attributes a paramount epistemic function to the spirit of place, which turns landscapes and places into sites of memory.[34] As "Oil-Making in Tuscany" suggests, Ross's *Italian Sketches* rests on a similar conception, so that both writers anticipate the distinction that cultural geography would trace between the *environment* as a physical space and *landscape* as an environment infused with history and culture.

Tuscan Landscapes as Sites of Culture

According to Barry Cunliffe, the environment may be defined as a "physical" entity, a "measurable" parcel of the land acting as "a blotting paper into which the cultural images of landscape are absorbed".[35] In this sense, the environment identifies a portion of the land in itself, whereas the landscape may be viewed as a cultural artifact, and anticipating this distinction, Ross and Lee view the Tuscan landscape as an environment modelled by the anthropic presence. Against the increasing commodification of tourism and cultural heritage, Ross's and Lee's travel memoirs provide a cultural counter-history of the places they visit, albeit with a significant difference. Lee's gaze focuses on the landscape to catch the spirit of the place, which can be perceived in the relics and remnants that are dissemi-

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[31] V. LEE, *Limbo and Other Essays*, London, Grant Richards, 1897, p. 45 (emphasis added).

[32] V. LEE, *Genius Loci*, p. 5. On these aspects see also L. WANITZEK, "'The South! something exclaims within me': Real and Imagined Spaces in Italy and the South in Vernon Lee's Travel Writing", *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens*, 83, 2016, http://journals.openedition.org/cve/2532 (last accessed on 28 September 2020).

[33] *Ibidem*, p. 126.

[34] On the epistemic function of the "genius loci" in Lee's travel memoirs see M. CANANI, "The Epistemology of Place in Vernon Lee's *Genius Loci* and D.H. Lawrence's *Twilight in Italy*", *RSV. Rivista di studi vittoriani*, 25 (50), 2020, pp. 55-73.

[35] B. CUNLIFFE, "Landscapes with People," in K. FLINT and H. MORPHY (eds), *Culture, Landscape and the Environment. The Linacre Lectures 1997*, Oxford, OUP, 2000, p. 114.

nated in the environment. Ross never explicitly refers to the "genius loci", but her gaze is nonetheless placed on the cultural aspects of rural Tuscany, as her interest in the peasants and their customs demonstrates.

For both Ross and Lee, the representation of landscape is thus inseparable from the history, culture, and tradition that moulded it over the centuries. The anthropic presence in the physical space, embodied in sites such as castles, palaces, and churches, but also in *poderi* and farms, is an integral part of both writers' sketches of Tuscan places. Ross's description of the Arno valley in "Oil-Making Tuscany" intersperses visual impressions with history when she observes the battlement walls in Lastra a Signa, a "stern and weather-beaten" site that seems to be "still frowning defiance to the enemies of Florence".[36] Consequently, Ross breaks her sketch of the "astounding view" of the valley in order to foreground the cultural layers on which it is built. The medieval *mura* testify to the Pisan conquest of the town in 1365 and the siege of Florence in 1529-1530, when the Spanish army guided by the Prince of Orange, Philibert de Chalon, overthrew the Republic of Florence and restored the Medici. Ross concisely traces the atrocities committed during the siege in the proverb "*E* [sic] *meglio stare al bosco e mangier pignoli, che stare in Castello con gli Spagnoli* (Better to live in the wood and eat stone-pine nuts, than in a castle with the Spaniards)".[37] Similar insights into Tuscan folklore, substantiated in frequent references to popular sayings and songs, bear witness to Ross's status as an observing subject who is fully integrated into the culture she observes.[38] Her attention is not directed to the extraordinary, but to the ordinary, to the customs and traditions that the landscape conveys. This focus is part of her gaze as an expatriate, and at times it overlaps with what Urray defines "the anthropological gaze", that is, the ability to relate sites, landscapes, and places to their historical or symbolical meaning.[39]

As a proof of the impossibility to separate landscape, culture, and history, Ross's description of "The Valley of the Arno" is fragmented by a much more detailed digression on the history of Lastra a Signa. On the road from San Colombano she sees "pretty country lanes, the hedges all glowing with the scarlet berries of the orange thorn, and the trees clothed in vines",[40] but again the medieval remnants prompt her remarks on the history of the town – from its fortification in the thirteenth century and the following Pisan assault, supported by the English *condottiere* Sir John Hawkwood, up to the Spanish siege:

Lastra a Signa was rebuilt in 1377 by the Republic of Florence, according to the advice of Sir John Hawkwood, and twenty years later the unfortunate little town was invested and taken by Alberigo, captain of Galeazzo Visconti, Lord of Milan, who was at deadly feud with the Signory. Again the walls were restored; and in 1529, when the imperialists besieged Florence, Francesco Ferrucci, whose headquarters were at Empoli, five miles down the river, garrisoned Lastra a Signa with some of his bravest troops. The Prince of Orange sent a strong force of Spaniards with scaling-ladders to take the place, who were repulsed with considerable loss; but munitions ran short in the fortress, and while

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[36] J. Ross, *Italian Sketches*, p. 114.

[37] *Ibidem*.

[38] See the essay "Popular Songs of Tuscany" in *Italian Sketches*.

[39] J. Urray, *The Tourist Gaze*, p. 20. On Ross's knowledge of the Tuscan rural heritage see also C. Capancioni, "Janet Ross's 'Love of Italian Peasant Songs': Tuscan Folk Songs and the Victorians", in F. Ciompi, R. Ferrari, and L. Giovanelli (eds), *Interconnecting Music and the Literary Word*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018, pp. 109-23.

[40] J. Ross, *Italian Sketches*, p. 43.

negotiations were going on, five hundred more Spanish lances arrived with battering-rams, effected an entrance on the south-east side, and cut the gallant defenders to pieces.[41]

Ross shifts from the Tuscan environment to the history that modelled it into the landscape she observes, thus foregrounding – albeit unnamed – the spirit of the place. This change of perspective also affects the linguistic construction of her sketch. She abandons the present tense and the sequence of participles that had characterised her attempt at immediacy and interrupts her visual description with a long verbal digression. Nevertheless, this fragmentation is consistent with the refusal of visual and verbal linearity that is inherent to the sketch. The literary counterpart of the visual principle of incompleteness, as Amanpal Garcha suggests, is a "temporal and spatial disconnection" that produces descriptions grounded in a "more-or-less synchronic temporality". The result is a discontinuous, "descriptive and essayistic text" that lacks a linear plot.[42] Garcha is primarily interested in the process that led Victorian writers such as Dickens, Thackeray, and Gaskell to incorporate the elements of the sketch into their novels, but the points that she makes also apply to the essay as a descriptive genre, which further suggests viewing Lee's travel memoirs as sketches of places conflating landscape and culture.

In "The Dockyard of Viareggio", Lee construes the delight produced by the landscape as inextricably linked to the past of the town, so that "one appreciates in this modern place whatever tells of former times: the Lucchese Palace, said to be haunted and evidently uninhabited, by the port; and the score of houses of the original bathing-place, now stranded far back by the receding Mediterranean, with their meagre grace of Empire pilasters and lintels".[43] As she bounces back and forth between visual and the verbal descriptions, and between the present and the past of the place, Lee implicitly states the impossibility to separate nature from culture. It is such bond that makes a portion of the environment a landscape and foregrounds its distinctiveness, as she explains in her memories of "Vallombrosa":

After the head and stuffiness of the plain, what an impression, on going out, of coolness, freshness, scent of grass and flowers, songs of birds […]. That little garden had the delightfulness of something exotic: scant, *none of your Italian summer excess of vegetation*, just a few flowers, cared for, showing a little difficulty of growth, as in *an English cottage-garden*. But *here and there, affirming Italy*, an old gate, architectural and finely cut, of the monk's time; and behind the trees, the belfry and towers, the extent of the former monastery.[44]

In their interplay of nature and culture, Ross and Lee constantly move from the observation of the landscape to broader considerations on the human presence that has modelled such landscape over time. By conflating different time perspectives, they capture the action of man on the land both diachronically – as churches, towers, and battlements suggest – and synchronically – as the presence of peasants and farms indicates. In a passage from "Tuscan Midsummer Magic" that gently blends visual impressions with memories, and colours with fragrances, Lee remarks that "The Apennines of Lucca and Pistoia, with their sudden revelation of Italian fields and lanes, of flowers on wall and along roadside, of bells

[41] *Ibidem*, pp. 45-46.
[42] A. GARCHA, *From Sketch to Novel: The Development of Victorian Fiction*, Cambridge, CUP, 2009, pp. 5, 8.
[43] V. LEE, *The Tower of the Mirrors*, pp. 169-70.
[44] *Ibidem*, p. 176 (emphasis added).

ringing in the summer sky, of peasants working in the fields and with the loom and distaff, meant Italy".[45] In Ross's *Sketches*, the Tuscan landscape is inextricably linked to the life and activity of the peasants. The beginning of "San Gimignano delle Belle Torre [*sic*]" rapidly moves from the picturesque scenery of the medieval town, "crowning the hill" with "its square towers breaking the sky-line in a quaint and picturesque manner", to its medieval history. But the landscape is also home to the *contadini*, with their daily tasks and customs:

On the road from Poggibonsi to San Gimignano, […] we came in view of the towers of unequal height, and the grey walls of the old town stood out against the blue sky. The country is rich and smiling, and the contadini were busy tying up their vines and cutting green fodder for their cattle, while the hedgerows were enamelled with flowers glowing in the bright April sun.[46]

According to Capancioni, *Italian Sketches* reveals Ross's desire to explore the identity of the Italians in the decades that saw the actual development of the nation after the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861. In this sense, her literary representation of Tuscan landscapes and places is first of all a social investigation of late nineteenth-century Italy, and bears witness to a crucial moment in the history of the country. Indeed, Ross's socio-anthropological interest was to consolidate over the following decades, as her examination of the social structure of *mezzeria* in *Old Florence and Modern Tuscany* suggests.[47] In Lee's case, this historico-cultural function is entrusted to the "genius loci", which she explores as a result of her non-human encounters. Despite such individual differences, it is their common engagement with cultural memory that bestows organicity to the fragmentary quality of their sketches of places. Either synchronically or diachronically, embodied in the peasants working the land or in landmarks and other historical sites, the action of humankind turns the environment into a landscape. Accordingly, in both Ross's and Lee's sketches of Tuscan places, the landscape becomes a site of memory that testifies to the history of the region, its towns and countryside, but also to its multiple stories, often neglected by official records.

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[45] V. LEE, *Limbo*, p. 82.
[46] J. ROSS, *Italian Sketches*, pp. 154-55.
[47] C. CAPANCIONI, "Victorian Women Writers and the Truth of 'the Other Side of Italy'", in C. BROOME SAUNDERS (ed.), *Women, Travel Writing, and Truth*, New York and London, Routledge, 2014, pp. 109-11; see also the essay "Mezzeria, or Land Tenure in Tuscany", in J. ROSS, *Old Florence and Modern Tuscany*, London, Dent, 1904, pp. 211-22.

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GIULIO MILONE

Grieving on the Edge:
Helen Macdonald's *H is for Hawk*

Abstract: This article takes a close look at Helen Macdonald's memoir *H is for Hawk*, in which the author chronicles her year spent training a female goshawk as a way of coping with her father's sudden death. Drawing on some key elements of trauma and grief theory, the article argues that Macdonald's book explores and masterfully renders an experience of undoing as a consequence of traumatic grief, which causes the collapse of any fixed border, category or sense of identity. From these premises, evidence of this constant walking on a series of *lignes de partage* can be variously found in Macdonald's text, from her approach to generic conventions to her critical discussion of authoritative texts on both falconry and grief and, most importantly, in her confrontation with a wild animal.

Keywords: Life Writing. Helen Macdonald. Grief and Trauma. T.H. White. Animals.

1. In 2004, philosopher Judith Butler published *Undoing Gender*, a collection of essays written on disparate occasions in which she reflects on gender, sexuality, and psychoanalysis. In the opening paragraphs of one of these essays, titled "Beside Oneself", she broaches the topic of grief, and what essentially makes for a grievable life:

I am not sure I know when mourning is successful, or when one has fully mourned another human being. I'm certain, though, that it does not mean that one has forgotten the person, or that something else comes along to take his or her place. I don't think it works that way. I think instead that one mourns when one accepts the fact that the loss one undergoes will be one that changes you, changes you possibly forever, and that mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation the full result of which you cannot know in advance. So there is losing, and there is the transformative effect of loss, and this latter cannot be charted or planned.[1]

Though not explicitly, Butler is obviously dialoguing with a well-established tradition of Grief Studies whose starting point is commonly traced to Sigmund Freud's seminal essay on mourning and melancholia.[2] In those few pages, the two titular terms are presented as similar but different forms of response to loss: on the one hand, there is mourning, understood as "the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on";[3] though sharing the same underlying causes as mourning, melancholia is regarded instead as a pathological disposition for which medical treatment might be unavoidable.[4] Without

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[1] J. BUTLER, "Beside Oneself", in EAD., *Undoing Gender*, New York and London, Routledge, 2004, p. 18.
[2] S. FREUD, "Mourning and Melancholia", in ID., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, ed. J. STRACHEY, London, Hogarth Press, 1957, pp. 243-58.
[3] *Ibidem*, p. 243.
[4] *Ibidem*.

delving deep into the peculiarities of both scenarios, it is already evident at surface level that Freud drew a neat distinction between normal and pathological grief, thus envisaging mourning as the only socially acceptable behaviour between the two. This theoretical model regarding grief was favourably received, at least at the beginning,[5] because it left room for some form of reassurance in knowing that the work of mourning, "after a certain lapse of time",[6] would end.

Butler, however, is more aligned with the so-called second wave of Grief Studies, whose representatives openly challenge and ultimately reject the rigid Freudian dichotomy between 'normal' and 'pathological' grief, particularly arguing against the supposed finiteness ascribed to mourning.[7] What emerges from these more recent studies is an understanding of grief as a complex and intricate process that cannot be slotted into a step-by-step grid and should rather be accepted in its being "open and evolving".[8] Since there is no clear deadline, one should be concerned with what happens *during* the process, and not just *after* it. When Freud claims that the ego becomes "free and uninhibited again",[9] his wording seems to fail to capture the changes a grieving person undergoes, not to mention the fact that "in grieving we must relearn our very selves".[10] After such a process, a person is rarely the same as before.

This is also in line with Butler's position, because in the context of her essay she presents emotional grief – together with other intense feelings, such as sexual passion and political rage – as a perfect example of one's body and mind experiencing *ecstasy*, a word which is here to be understood in its etymological sense. To be 'ec-static' means, literally, to be outside oneself, or "to be transported beyond oneself by a passion, but also to be *beside oneself* with rage or grief".[11] Grief and loss, as Butler posits, have a profoundly "transformative effect" that cannot be "charted or planned", and which ultimately leads to one's own "undoing".

Something similar to Butler's claims can be found in a recent example of life narrative: in 2014, English naturalist Helen Macdonald[12] wrote about her life-changing experience

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[5] Freud's model was also the first of several studies to understand grief as a process paving the way for a complete recovery. See for example the popular five stages of grief mapped out by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in 1969, where the grief process is spelled out according to five moments, or emotional states: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. See E. KÜBLER-ROSS, *On Death & Dying: What the Dying Have to Teach Doctors, Nurses, Clergy and Their Own Families*, New York, Scribner, (1969) 2014.

[6] S. FREUD, "Mourning and Melancholia", p. 244.

[7] George Hagman, for example, said that Freud failed to "recognize the complexity and uniqueness of mourning experience". Similarly, Paul Rosenblatt meditates on the process of reality-testing (that is, recalling memories of the deceased and gradually severing all attachment to them) and argues that in no way can grief actually end, given that memories may not be retrieved simultaneously. This ultimately suggests that grief may even last a lifetime. See, respectively, G. HAGMAN, "Beyond Decathexis: Toward a New Psychoanalytic Understanding and Treatment of Mourning", in R.A. NEIMEYER (ed.), *Meaning, Reconstruction and the Experience of Loss*, Washington, DC, American Psychological Association, 2001, p. 24; P.C. ROSENBLATT, "Grief That Does Not End", in D. KLASS, P.R. SILVERMAN and S.L. NICKMAN (eds), *Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief*, Philadelphia, Taylor and Francis, 1996, pp. 45-58.

[8] G. HAGMAN, "Beyond Decathexis", p. 18.

[9] S. FREUD, "Mourning and Melancholia", p. 245.

[10] T. ATTIG, "Relearning the World: Making and Finding Meanings", in R.A. NEIMEYER (ed.), *Meaning, Reconstruction and the Experience of Loss*, p. 40.

[11] J. BUTLER, "Beside Oneself", p. 20 (emphasis in original).

[12] Helen Macdonald (Chertsey, Surrey, 1970—) is an English writer. The daughter of two journalists, she studied at Cambridge University, where she is currently an affiliated research scholar at the Department of

with the training of a female goshawk as a way of dealing with the sudden death of her beloved father. Her published memoir – suggestively titled *H is for Hawk* – embodies and thematises how traumatic grief might engender the collapse, fragmentation and even undoing of the narrating subject. My article aims therefore to show how this grief-induced condition of instability is easily discernible in – if not at the very foundation of – three substantial features of Macdonald's text, i.e., her approach and handling of different genres while working within the slippery 'memoir' label; her critical discussion of authoritative texts on both falconry and grief; and, lastly, her complex and almost dangerous confrontation with a wild animal.

2. *H is for Hawk* (henceforth abbreviated as *Hawk*) first appeared in 2014 and quickly became a critically acclaimed bestseller. Within the same year, the book went on to win both the Costa Book of the Year Award and, most notably, the former Samuel Johnson Prize (now Baillie Gifford Prize) for non-fiction. The judges of the panel for the latter praised the cohesive hybridity of the text and commended Macdonald's deft way of combining different genres.[13] However, in this context it might be useful to reflect on the ways this – rightfully praised – hybridity can be achieved within a memoir, as well as on how and to what effects it interacts with the topic of grief.

When it comes to discussing genres and labels, the prominence of grief in Macdonald's narrative allows one to argue that *Hawk* is primarily a 'grief memoir', a term which identifies a subgenre of life narratives where authors and their grieving processes over the loss of loved ones are put at centre stage, and of which several specimens have emerged in the last few years.[14] If truth be told, to say that *Hawk* is a book about overcoming grief while training a bird of prey would be definitely reductive, because Macdonald's personal story is in fact paralleled with an abridged history of falconry and a glimpse into the life of T.H. White. White is a British author who is generaly recalled for his Arthurian series *The Once and Future King* (1958), but who in 1951 had also penned a lesser known book describing his attempts at training a goshawk.[15] There are thus multiple thematic strands and genres adding to the structure of *Hawk*, and this back-and-forth between them can be said to be

History and Philosophy and Science. She has published two small books of poetry (*Simple Objects*, 1993 and *Shaler's Fish*, 2001), a book of cultural history (*Falcon*, 2006), and a collection of essays (*Vesper Flights*, 2020). She rose to popularity with the publication of her memoir *H is for Hawk* in 2014. Parallel to her academic career, she has also collaborated on various radio programmes on falconry and was a guest on episodes of the BBC documentary series *Birds Britannia* (2010) and *Natural World* (2017).

[13] "Labour MP Alan Johnson, one of the judges, said that marrying such different types of material could have gone horribly wrong, but she brings them together expertly", in S. MOSS, "Interview with Helen Macdonald: A Bird's Eye View of Love and Loss", *The Guardian*, 5 November 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/nov/05/helen-macdonald-interview-winner-samuel-johnson-prize-falconry (last accessed on 20 June 2020).

[14] As of today, not much has been written on grief memoir as a genre. It is mentioned only in passing by G. Thomas Couser in one of his interesting studies, whereas Michael Dennis speaks about it more in detail but with the designation of 'grief accounts', in order to identify a group of autobiographical texts that deal with a kind of grief characterised by a recurring set of themes and structural patterns. More recently, Amy-Katerini Prodromou's work has specifically focused on hybrid grief memoirs written by female writers. See, respectively, G.T. COUSER, *Memoir: An Introduction*, Oxford, OUP, 2012; M.R. DENNIS, "The Grief Account: Dimensions of a Contemporary Bereavement Genre", *Death Studies*, 32 (9), 2008, pp. 801-36; A.K. PRODROMOU, *Navigating Loss in Women's Contemporary Memoir*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

[15] See T.H. WHITE, *The Goshawk*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, (1951) 1963.

in keeping with the "more impressionistic"[16] form of memoir, which usually allows for a looser structure than, say, a fairly standard work of autobiography, or other forms of life narratives relying on monothematic subjects and a strict chronological grid.[17]

From the very first pages, it becomes evident that *Hawk* is an unusual memoir because it downright flaunts evidence of its contamination, while subtly nodding to the connection between such a generic instability and the undoing of its narrating subject in response to grief. The different facets of *Hawk*, however, unfold in an orderly fashion in the first four chapters, which are to be read as a sort of *overture* to the rest of the book.

The first chapter, titled "Patience", is a perfect example of nature writing, with Macdonald describing the landscape of the Brecklands, the "broken lands" which she adores because "of all the places I know in England, it feels to me the wildest".[18] It is a perfect place, she tells us, to find and observe goshawks, and it is where she heads to one early spring morning, on an unplanned trip:

Clearings. That's what I needed. Slowly my brain righted itself into spaces unused for months. For so long I'd been living in libraries and college rooms, frowning at screens, marking essays, chasing down academic references. This was a different kind of hunt. Here I was a different animal.[19]

This brief remark might seem rather commonplace at first, but it actually reveals an important clue about Macdonald's attitude: being a research fellow at Cambridge, she is used to thinking as trained academics usually do. Although her education and readings do play a crucial role in the shaping of the book, here she is signalling her intention to move away, even if temporarily, from a self-assured and rational frame of mind.[20] Furthermore, when projecting Macdonald's longing – that is, chasing down goshawks rather than academic references – into a meta-textual level, we realise that she also hints at the hybrid nature of her book. In other words, her story cannot be told by exclusively relying on the hard facts and sometimes pedant technicalities of academia, nor by systematically drawing on a standardised autobiographical frame.

The account of the trip also doubles as an introduction to one of the other characters of the story: as she gazes at the surrounding landscape, waiting for goshawks to appear, Macdonald is reminded of the time she went birdwatching to the same place with her father, Alisdair. A restless nine-year-old, young Helen could not grasp the important lesson

[16] As Couser points out, "being based on memory rather than research, a memoir will necessarily be very different from a biography. It will be, or resemble, a reminiscence, consisting of personal recollections" (G.T. COUSER, *Memoir: An Introduction*, p. 19).

[17] Besides Couser's aforementioned study of memoirs, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's work on autobiography also offers an excellent and detailed introduction to the many quandaries pertaining to the vast universe of life writing and life narratives. See S. SMITH and J. WATSON, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, Second Edition, Minneapolis, Minnesota U.P., 2010.

[18] H. MACDONALD, *H is for Hawk*, London, Vintage, (2014) 2015, p. 7.

[19] *Ibidem*, p. 5.

[20] It is not the first time that Macdonald tries to transcend the limitations of conventional academic writing. As she states in the preface to the second edition of *Falcon*, she decided to write that book and freeze her doctoral dissertation on the history of science because, while researching material for the latter, she stumbled upon fascinating anecdotes and stories, and confesses that "[p]arts of me that weren't just an academic historian began to whisper that there were extraordinary things [in the Archives of Falconry at the World Centre for Birds of Prey in Idaho] I couldn't fit into my thesis, and that grieved me" (H. MACDONALD, "Preface to the 2016 Edition", in *Falcon*, London, Reaktion Books, 2016, Kindle Edition).

that her father, a press photographer, was trying to teach her: "He said it was the most important thing of all to remember, this: that when you wanted to see something very badly, sometimes you had to stay still, stay in the same place, remember how much you wanted to see it, and be patient".[21]

Through this recollection, Macdonald quickly sketches the loving father-daughter dynamic that underlies the whole book while also introducing the crucial theme of patience, a virtue so vital when it comes to goshawks, be it when observing them or training them. By way of an objective correlative, Macdonald vividly recognises patience in a small clump of reindeer moss that she weeds and takes home: it is a type of lichen that can survive under any meteorological condition and is described as "patience made manifest",[22] thus becoming a memento of natural resilience as well as of the "grown-up Truth"[23] which her father had given her but which, being a child, she was not able to understand. Having placed it near the phone, it is also what she ostensibly stares at when, three weeks later, she would receive the news that her father was dead.

The second chapter, "Lost", ferries the book towards the territories of the grief memoir, with Macdonald relating the call from her mother that announced her father's death from a heart attack. Macdonald immediately frames this event as utterly traumatic,[24] starting from the way in which she is informed – "I knew he was dead because […] she used a voice I'd never heard before to say it"[25] – to how she begins experiencing the collapse of spatial and temporal perception: "I can't, even now, arrange it in the right order. The memories are like heavy blocks of glass. I can put them down in different places but they don't make a story".[26] In life, Alisdair had been a "dad, but also [a] friend, and partner in crime"[27] to her; his death is invested with an even harsher traumatic value when her emotional distress is cast as off-balance when compared to the rest of the world: "Planes still landed, cars still drove, people still shopped and talked and worked. None of these things made any sense at all. For weeks I felt I was made of dully burning metal".[28]

While grieving, Macdonald starts experiencing a sort of madness that she attempts to contain and schematise through scientific knowledge:

Because these were the normal madnesses of grief. I learned this from books. I bought books on grieving, on loss and bereavement. They spilled over my desk in tottering piles. Like a good academic, I thought books were for answers. Was it reassuring to be told that everyone sees ghosts? That everyone stops eating? Or can't stop eating? Or that grief comes in stages that can be numbered and pinned like beetles in boxes? I read that after denial comes grief. Or anger. Or guilt. I remember worrying about which stage I was at. I wanted to taxonomise the process, order it, make it sensible. But there was no sense, and I didn't recognise any of these emotions at all.[29]

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[21] H. MACDONALD, *H is for Hawk*, p. 10.

[22] *Ibidem.*

[23] *Ibidem*, p. 9.

[24] My understanding of a traumatic event draws on Cathy Caruth's classical definition of trauma as "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled, repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (C. CARUTH, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History,* Baltimore, Johns Hopkins U.P., 1996, p. 11).

[25] H. MACDONALD, *H is for Hawk*, p. 12.

[26] *Ibidem*, p. 14.

[27] *Ibidem.*

[28] *Ibidem*, p. 15.

[29] *Ibidem*, pp. 16-17.

Trying to set a barrier against an imminent undoing, Macdonald rehashes here her academic *modus operandi*, turning to books and science in the hope of finding comfort in 'hard facts', only to discover that it is not possible to superimpose orderly, unemotional and detached schemata to one's personal experience: traumatic events, as Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub have repeatedly argued, are always "occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be construed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frames of reference".[30]

While jumping from one attempt at containing her grief to the other, Macdonald also claims to have begun dreaming about hawks on a regular basis; in particular, about a goshawk she was in charge of looking after when working at a bird-of-prey centre. Macdonald's obsession with hawks gradually emerges as another key theme, thanks to the foregrounding of these recurring dreams. The hawks' link with her grief is also fostered via a subtle lesson in philology: at the beginning of the chapter, she unpacks the etymology behind the term 'bereavement', which comes from the Old English *bereafian*, meaning 'to deprive of, take away, seize, rob'.[31] At the end of the same chapter, she illustrates how 'raptor', as in 'bird of prey', comes from the Latin *raptor*, meaning 'robber', from *rapere*, meaning 'seize'. "From then on", she tells us, "the hawk was inevitable".[32]

In the third chapter, "Small Worlds", Macdonald introduces the topic of falconry, describing her relationship with birds of prey and her fascination with the hawks' supposed ability to slip into "another, wilder world from which humans had been utterly erased".[33] She also admits to being passionate about falcons, while having mixed feelings about goshawks, which are notoriously much harder to train, being "things of death and difficulty: spooky, pale-eyed psychopaths that lived and killed in woodland thickets".[34] Macdonald used to believe that she would never want to fly a goshawk in her life as a falconer, but the traumatic loss of her father and the recurring dreams about hawks ultimately led to a radical change in her views, thus ratifying the Butlerian belief that loss engenders profound transformations that cannot be charted nor planned: "*Not for me*, I'd thought, many times. *Nothing like me*. But the world had changed, and so had I".[35] Determined to follow her inner instincts – or, rather, the hawks she has been dreaming of – Macdonald sets out to find a small goshawk to train and manages to get in touch with a hawk-breeder.

However, as soon as she finalises the deal and prepares to leave for Ireland and pick up her hawk, Macdonald is reminded of a book read several years earlier, the very thought of which she would rather keep at a distance. The book in question is T.H. White's *The Goshawk*, and Macdonald confesses that her first reading of that work had been upsetting, because it consisted in the written account of an inexperienced man's amateurish and disastrous attempt to train a bird of prey that suffered greatly in the process. At first, the book was not well received within the falconry community, but it later became a sort of overlooked masterpiece.

In this regard, Macdonald switches gear once again and manoeuvres her book towards

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[30] S. FELMAN and D. LAUB, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, New York, Routledge, 1991, p. 5.

[31] H. MACDONALD, *H is for Hawk*, p. 13.

[32] *Ibidem*, p. 18.

[33] *Ibidem*, p. 22.

[34] *Ibidem*.

[35] *Ibidem*, p. 24 (emphasis in original).

full-on biography, devoting the fourth chapter to the introduction of the figure of "Mr White", the author of *The Goshawk*. White's book is presented as the thematic and spiritual older brother of *Hawk*, with Macdonald hinting at a whole set of similarities and divergences between the two. She explicitly points out that the "book you are reading is my story. It is not a biography of Terence Hanbury White. But White is part of my story all the same. I have to write about him because he was there".[36]

Nature writing, grief memoir, a treatise on falconry, and biography: the trauma of loss brings all these seemingly disparate threads together. Macdonald realises quite early that she will be unable to tell only one story without telling other stories in conjunction with it, thus hinting at the fact that a single literary genre will not suffice either. Therefore, in the hope of downplaying the disarray and confusion unleashed by grief, she employs these four opening chapters to establish the cardinal points meant to circumscribe the area in which her complex and stratified narrative will unfurl. The final result is a hybrid text built on a memoiristic grid, where the author avails herself of multiple genres that blend and speak with each other, both mirroring and witnessing her own state of undoing.

3. The hybrid quality of *Hawk*'s textual palimpsest needs stressing, especially because one of its most interesting traits lies in the way Macdonald uses her own personal experience as a starting point for establishing a complex dialogue with other texts. This literary ploy is obviously far from new, but it is its function in relation to the element of traumatic grief that makes it worth exploring in detail. Macdonald in fact engages with a handful of texts as she carries on a passionate conversation which often ends up addressing the authors of these very texts as well. In these intertextual disquisitions, her tone juggles between the critical and blatantly furious, but there is also room for empathy and gratitude.

To start with, throughout her book Macdonald discusses several canonical texts of falconry which she employs as broad guidelines for training her goshawk. She shows a deep understanding of their content, their problematic sexual politics and the socio-political contexts in which such books were written. Indeed, by reading *Hawk*, we learn a great deal about falconry, of which Macdonald has mastered the "perfect, secret language"[37] from an early age, when she chased down "all the boys' books".[38] At its heart, *Hawk* is also a book that addresses the gender misbalance and occasional misogyny of this specific practice: to her childhood peers, Macdonald's passion turned her into "the most appalling falconry bore".[39] Her first encounter with professional falconers made her feel that, no matter how badly she wanted to, she "might not be *entirely* like these men, that they might view [her] as a curiosity rather than a kindred spirit".[40] Even in falconry parlance, to tame a goshawk is to *man* him. Most importantly, when a conversation with an acquaintance leads to a shallow remark about the relationship developing between Macdonald and her goshawk because "You're a woman, and she's female",[41] she becomes enraged and spotlights that most of the books on falconry written by men describe the wildness of hawks in clearly

[36] *Ibidem*, p. 38.
[37] *Ibidem*, p. 48.
[38] *Ibidem*, p. 28.
[39] *Ibidem*.
[40] *Ibidem*, p. 20 (emphasis in original).
[41] *Ibidem*, p. 110.

gendered terms: "Like women, Goshawks were inexplicable. Sulky. Flighty and hysterical. Their moods were pathological. They were beyond all reason. […] They were things to win, to court, to love".[42]

This survey of canonical texts on falconry seems to point towards an evident lack of space for women in this practice, and Macdonald is outspoken about her dissatisfaction. As a consequence, throughout *Hawk* she both acknowledges the existence and relevance of a whole literary tradition of authoritative works on the practice and ardently fights for the legitimacy of her own experience. Besides constituting another instance of a well-read academic mind at work, this attitude is also perfectly in line with her simultaneous deconstruction of the cookie-cutter models and impersonal bullet points of the grieving process: it is an act of dismissal that, as shown, similarly follows the scouring of canonical readings (in this case, on grief) after highlighting how they cannot be applied to her own case.

However, what really elevates *Hawk* is the way Macdonald's story as a grieving falconer is paralleled with a close reading of T.H. White's *The Goshawk*, a less known memoir about training hawks written by a lesser known author to whom contemporary popular culture actually owes a great debt: White is in fact the author of the Arthurian tetralogy *The Once and Future King*, the first book of which served as the basis for the popular Disney film *The Sword in the Stone* (1963).[43]

The Goshawk is the written account of White's disastrous attempt at training a German-imported northern goshawk using traditional falconry techniques, as opposed to more modern ones. Halfway through the training, the hawk disappears and White is unable to find it. The action takes place in Buckinghamshire during the 1930s, a period in which "long walks in the English countryside, often at night, were astonishingly popular",[44] and White indeed takes Gos, his male goshawk (in falconry terms called 'tiercel' because males are usually one-third smaller than females), on many strolls around the countryside, as part of his project to man the raptor. The manuscript for *The Goshawk* had been shelved for years because its content exposed the utter inexperience of its author, who later became more skilled and even an authority on the subject, but in the end, in 1951, the book was published (with a somewhat apologetic postscript) under pressure from Wren Howard, White's friend and publisher for Jonathan Cape.

Macdonald first stumbled across *The Goshawk* in a bookshop at the age of eight, fascinated by the goshawk on the front but puzzled by the back cover, which promised "an eighteenth-century story of seduction". When she proceeded to read the book, she became first bewildered and then enraged, because it "wasn't *anything* like the other falconry books", but rather "a book about falconry by a man who seemed to know nothing about it".[45] Her negative impression is validated by a review in a British Falconer's Club journal, where *The*

[42] *Ibidem*, p. 112.

[43] The success and influence of White's book were not limited to its Disneyian adaptation. In 1960, his work was also adapted into a Broadway musical, *Camelot*, quoted by First Lady Jackie Kennedy to describe the White House in her famously televised home tour. By the same token, *Harry Potter*'s author J.K. Rowling declared that White's Arthurian books were a huge influence on her work and that Wart, the young protagonist of White's stories, can be seen as "Harry's spiritual ancestor". See "J.K. (Joanne Kathleen) Rowling (1966—)", *The Guardian*, 22 July 2008, http://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/jun/11/jkjoannekathleenrowling (last accessed on 2 July 2020).

[44] H. MACDONALD, *H is for Hawk*, p. 103.

[45] *Ibidem*, p. 30 (emphasis in original).

Goshawk is completely panned: "The men in tweed had spoken. I was on the right side, was allowed to dislike this grown-up and consider him a fool".[46] Still, years later, Macdonald finds herself inexplicably attracted to White's book when preparing to welcome a goshawk into her life as a way of coping with her father's death. As she admits, the thought of White had been haunting her for quite a long time:

Ever since I'd read *The Goshawk*, I'd wondered what kind of a man White was and why he had tied himself to a hawk he seemed to hate. And when I trained my own hawk a little space opened, like a window through leaves, onto this other life, in which was a man who was being hurt, and I saw them both more clearly.[47]

Hawk thus registers all the points of both convergence and divergence that Macdonald recognises in comparing her progress with White's. At the same time, the memoir provides a portrait of the author, with the help of White's official biography[48] and his private journals, which she consulted at the famous Harry Ransom Center in Austin, Texas.

The first overlap between the two paths is their very beginning: both Macdonald and White cut loose from the world and escape to the wild. She writes that "[w]hen you are broken, you run",[49] but whereas the former is broken by her grief, the latter is haunted by his inability to fully fit within society for other reasons: a schoolmaster at Stowe School for five years, where he taught young pupils, White was a closeted homosexual who struggled to suppress his sadomasochistic impulses.[50] As Macdonald observes, his was a life "of perpetual disguise",[51] of desperately trying to belong to an unwelcoming community.

It is easy to see how both Macdonald and White are scarred by personal traumas that, in different ways, pertain to matters of social performances. Macdonald is powerless to face and process grief in accordance with sanitised and community-approved standards, as illustrated by an exemplary episode of the complications with a memorial service for her father. White, on the other hand, is incapable of mingling with other people in a sexless and heteronormative society on the brink of war. In a certain sense, they can both be read as outsiders, but there is a marked difference in how the two react to their nonconformist condition: if Macdonald ultimately appears to be deliberately disdainful of displaying grief in public and in predetermined terms, at no time does White hide how much he is suffering for not being able to behave like the 'others'.

Both Macdonald and White are drawn to goshawks because of their nature. The former

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[46] *Ibidem*, p. 31.

[47] *Ibidem*, p. 38.

[48] See S. TOWNSEND WARNER, *T.H. White: A Biography*, London, Viking, 1967.

[49] H. MACDONALD, *H is for Hawk*, p. 46.

[50] The debate around White's sexuality is complex and involves an extremely delicate matter such as suspicions of his being a paedophile, perhaps as a consequence of the abuse White himself had suffered as a child at his father's hands. As Macdonald acknowledges, "[w]hen White died of heart failure in January 1964, far from home in a cabin on the SS Exeter in Greece, his friends were concerned for his reputation. There were things in his journals they did not want to come to light, matters relating to his sexuality that if spoken of at all, had to be handled with rare delicacy. They needed to find a suitable biographer. They chose Sylvia Townsend Warner, because she had corresponded with White, and he had liked her books. And for another reason: she was gay. 'You will be sympathetic to his character,' Michael Howard informed her. 'If it is a sufficiently bad character I should certainly be sympathetic to it,' she replied" (H. MACDONALD, *H is for Hawk*, pp. 37-38). It should be noted that at no time does Macdonald explicitly use the word 'paedophilia', although she frequently mentions White's unrequited crushes and fantasies over both young boys and girls.

[51] *Ibidem*, p. 39.

confesses that these birds of prey represent everything she aims to be, that is, "solitary, self-possessed, free from grief, and numb to the hurts of human life";[52] on the other hand, the latter becomes fascinated by hawks while tackling the same falconry readings as Macdonald's:

There was a sentence which suddenly struck fire from the mind. The sentence was: "She reverted to a feral state." A longing came to my mind, then, that I should be able to do this also. The word 'feral' had a kind of magical potency which allied itself with two other words, 'ferocious' and 'free'. 'Fairy' 'Fey', 'aeriel' and other discreditable alliances ranged themselves behind the great chord of 'ferox'. To revert to a feral state! I took a farm-labourer's cottage at five shillings a week, and wrote to Germany for a goshawk.[53]

On the surface, the two might be seen to share similar intentions but, in explaining her reasons, Macdonald signals the differences between White's project and hers. She is more oriented towards becoming "numb to the hurts of human life" because she is unable to face grief, but at the same time she also argues that White's desire to "revert to a feral state" is more tied to what he – not so secretly – aims to project onto the goshawk:

His young German goshawk was a living expression of all the dark, discreditable desires within himself he'd tried to repress for years: it was a thing fey, fairy, feral, ferocious and cruel. He had tried for so long to be a gentleman. Tried to fit in, to adhere to all the rules of civilised society, to be normal, to be like everyone else. But his years at Stowe and his analysis and the fear of war had brought him to breaking point. He had refused humanity in favour of hawks, but he could not escape himself. Once again White was engaged in a battle to civilise the perversity and unruliness within himself. Only now he had put those things in the hawk, and he was trying to civilise them there. He found himself in a strange, locked battle with a bird that was all the things he longed for, but had always fought against. It was a terrible paradox. A proper tragedy. No wonder living with Gos brought him nearly to madness.[54]

The different configurations of the two human-animal relationships are now more evident. In her goshawk, Macdonald sees a model to be emulated, a perspective which she strives to inhabit; on the other hand, White is undertaking a challenge against himself, or what Macdonald describes as "a test of manhood", as his tiercel becomes a proxy for "all the dark, discreditable desires within himself he'd tried to repress for years". [55]

When training his Gos, White had not yet reached a substantial level of experience. His early mistakes with Gos resulted in the hawk's odd, undisciplined behaviour, to which White reacts with extremely violent thoughts:

And oh! the agony of patience, the brooding and godlike benevolence which had been exerted. At the thousandth bate in a day, on an arm that ached to the bone with its L-shaped rigidity under the weight of the bird, merely to twitch him gently back to the glove, to speak to him kindly with the little mew which of my conversation he seemed to like best, to smile past him at space, to re-assure with tranquillity, when one yearned to beat him down—with a mad surge of blood to the temples to pound, pash, dismember, wring, wrench, pluck, cast about in all directions, batter, bash, tug and stamp on, utterly to punish, and obliterate, have done with and finally finish this dolt, cow, maniac, unteachable, unutterable, unsupportable Gos.[56]

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[52] *Ibidem*, p. 85.
[53] T.H. WHITE, *A Sort of Mania* (unpublished manuscript), quoted in H. MACDONALD, *H is for Hawk*, p. 45.
[54] *Ibidem*, pp. 79-80.
[55] *Ibidem*, p. 127.
[56] T.H. WHITE, *The Goshawk*, p. 47.

When White hurls at Gos, he is actually redirecting those insults at himself for his inability to tame the raptor. But this raptor, as stressed, also represents all the hidden desires he is trying to suppress. White felt both disgust and shame at his sadistic fantasies, especially because he was sure of their being a by-product of the abuse he himself experienced as a child from his father and his masters. When he punishes Gos, White acts out traumatic memories of his childhood, but at the same time he is also making room for his fantasies by taking up the role of the abuser: he is both the abuser and the abused, and this is exactly the "terrible paradox" to which Macdonald refers.

The Goshawk, however, is not only a book about White's lost battle with Gos: being a day-to-day account, it also registers the more positive and uplifting episodes between man and animal, and Macdonald makes sure to mention them as well in her book. In particular, she notices how Gos gifts White with "the joys of domesticity"[57] and, most importantly, the possibility of feeling "almost like a mother nourishing her child inside her",[58] his text thus joining the long list of classic books on animals authored by "gay writers who wrote of their relationships with animals in lieu of human loves of which they could not speak".[59]

White's sexual proclivities might prove discomforting matter to tackle. All the same, through minute research and unparalleled empathy, Macdonald sets out to understand what really happened with White and his goshawk. She acknowledges and cherishes what their stories have in common and departs from her initial hasty judgement on his book, even though she still labels his *modus operandi* as a perfect example of what *not* to do when training a raptor. Besides resorting to a biographical exercise as a counterpoise to her own experience, she simultaneously unravels the stories of two broken people that seek refuge from their traumas in nature and birds of prey. Paired with her discussion and subsequent demystification of established texts on grief and falconry, the pages of *Hawk* in which Macdonald considers her own personal experience in relation to different textual sources help her argue for the possibility of another, non-standard way of grieving, as well as another way of approaching the art of falconry. All the while, she shows how these two intricate dimensions interact with and influence each other when clashing, as happens both in her case and White's.

4. But what exactly happens between Macdonald and her hawk? Before answering this question, one may begin with another – and more general – one: what is it that often draws humans to confront themselves with animals? In her regular column for the *New York Times*, Macdonald observed that:

Animals don't exist in order to teach us things, but that is what they have always done, and most of what they teach us is what we think we know about ourselves. The purpose of animals in medieval bestiaries, for example, was to give us lessons in how to live. […] But our minds still work like bestiaries. We thrill at the notion that we could be as wild as a hawk or a weasel, possessing the inner ferocity to go after the things we want; we laugh at animal videos that make us yearn to experience life as joyfully as a bounding lamb. A photograph of the last passenger pigeon makes palpable the grief and fear of our own unimaginable extinction. We use animals as ideas to amplify

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[57] H. MACDONALD, *H is for Hawk*, p. 92.
[58] *Ibidem*, p. 28.
[59] *Ibidem*, p. 41.

and enlarge aspects of ourselves, turning them into simple, safe harbors for things we feel and often cannot express.[60]

Through the practical example of bestiaries, always "suspended between reality and imagination, between referential concreteness and symbolic truth",[61] Macdonald stresses how humans have always been prone to project onto animals those "aspects of ourselves" that we might not be able to come to terms with without operating from a removed distance. That is, without transferring these "things we feel and often cannot express" to an "other" that is not us, and that might not even be a human (as the case study of T.H. White and his Gos amply illustrates).

However, the acknowledgement of Macdonald's own relationship with animals, whose turns and rhythms are in this scenario fuelled by grief, is not as immediate. When recounting her initial web hunt for a goshawk to train, Macdonald confesses to her somewhat passive and simultaneously besotted state, writing that "The hawk had caught me. It was never the other way around".[62] What is really remarkable, however, is that she appears envious of its overall attitude: "The hawk was everything I wanted to be: solitary, self-possessed, free from grief, and numb to the hurts of human life".[63] She is perfectly aware of the physical and emotional burdens of the task she is taking upon herself, but decides to see it as the most helpful gambit she can use to escape the madness of grief in which she has precipitated.[64]

The first encounter between human and animal is told in retrospective with the tones of a classic tale of love at first sight. The raptor that Macdonald eventually trains is not the one she was supposed to pick up: at the designated meeting point, the hawk-breeder shows up with two goshawks, the second one being for another client. Upon opening up both cages in order to verify the code and bird associated with her purchase, Macdonald is stunned: "My heart jumps sideways. She is a conjuring trick. A reptile. A fallen angel. A griffon from the pages of an illuminated bestiary. Something bright and distant, like gold falling through water. A broken marionette of wings, legs and light-splashed feathers".[65] On the other hand, the bird that comes out from the second cage is presented in Victorian-like terms, as "a sort of madwoman in the attack", with Macdonald ironically doubling down on the *Jane Eyre* reference when she describes what she sees in the hawk's eye as "some madness from a distant country".[66] Disappointed by the hawk she was supposed to receive and overly enamoured with the other one, in the end she convinces the hawk-breeder to give her the one she wants.

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[60] H. MACDONALD, "What Animals Taught Me About Being Human", *The New York Times*, 16 May 2017, http://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/16/magazine/what-animals-taught-me-about-being-human.html (last accessed on 24 June 2020).

[61] A. STARA, "Animali che vivono nei racconti", in ID., *La tentazione di capire e altri saggi*, Firenze, Le Monnier, 2006, p. 64, my translation.

[62] H. MACDONALD, *H is for Hawk*, p. 24.

[63] *Ibidem*, p. 85.

[64] As Rebecca Chaplan has observed, "she needs a bird that will be strong enough to handle the aggression she dimly senses within herself. […] She therefore enters a state of complete absorption, a kind of primary maternal preoccupation that coincides with her mourning and withdrawal from her social world" (R. CHAPLAN, "Helen Macdonald's *H is for Hawk*", *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 64 [1], 2016, p. 196).

[65] H. MACDONALD, *H is for Hawk*, p. 53.

[66] *Ibidem*, pp. 54-55.

After the bird has become accustomed to Macdonald's presence – the first step in the training of any bird of prey – she is eventually given a name: Mabel, from the Latin *amabilis*, meaning 'loveable, dear'. This particular christening is in keeping with the most common superstition among falconers, according to which a hawk's ability is inversely proportional to the ferocity of its name but, that said, the calmness evoked by the chosen name mirrors Macdonald's desire to get "as far from Death as it could get".[67]

The training is long and laborious, made up of distinct phases that must be executed to the letter, and Macdonald has no choice but to resort to all those problematic books on falconry mentioned earlier, inasmuch as they present something tangible to hold on to. The rigour of these manuals is a safe anchor, as she trains Mabel while navigating the agonies of grief in parallel: having realised that her own grief does not necessarily come in stages as certain books have suggested, she hopes that Mabel's path is more linear, conventional and ultimately reassuring. However, grief and its traumatic burden inevitably complicate the endeavour, and the bookish knowledge helps Macdonald to locate the inner source of her distress:

Nothing was wrong with the hawk. She wasn't sick. She was a baby. She fell asleep because that's what babies do. I wasn't sick either. But I was orphaned and desperately suggestible, and I didn't know what was happening to me. […] I was in ruins. Some deep part of me was trying to rebuild itself, and its model was right there on my fist.[68]

Here Macdonald explicitly refers to Mabel as a model to be emulated; later on, she describes her resolution to train her as a way "to make it all disappear".[69] Framed in these terms, it becomes evident how coping with her father's death entails a withdrawal from the painful aspects of human emotions and rationality, an attempt to assume the hawk's point of view in order to tame both the bird and the grieving human: "I had put myself in the hawk's wild mind to tame her, and as the days passed in the darkened room my humanity was burning away".[70]

It is easy to pinpoint the signs of Macdonald's own undoing when she speaks of her humanity receding as she slowly settles into a precarious and potentially dangerous state of inbetweenness. She reverts to the goshawk's wildness as a way of escaping from the human world and the complications of grief, but the shock of her father's death keeps haunting her, since memories of the excursions and conversations she used to have with him are triggered by seemingly innocuous objects or places she stumbles upon while going around with Mabel.[71] Trauma, thus, constantly creeps up on Macdonald, obfuscating rationality and ultimately hindering any attempt at sublimating the pain:

The anger was vast and it came out of nowhere. It was the rage of something not fitting; the frustration of trying to push something in a box that is slightly too small. […] And finally you know it won't fit, know there is no way it can fit, but this doesn't stop you using brute force to try to crush it in,

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[67] *Ibidem*, p. 89.
[68] *Ibidem*, p. 85.
[69] *Ibidem*, p. 117.
[70] *Ibidem*, p. 86.
[71] The portrayal of these episodes also tracks with two Freudian tenets of trauma theory: Cathy Caruth's notion of 'latency' and Dominick LaCapra's idea of 'acting out'. See C. CARUTH, *Unclaimed Experience*; D. LACAPRA, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins U.P., (2001) 2014.

punishing the bloody thing for not fitting properly. That was what it was like: but I was the box, I was the thing that didn't fit, and I was the person smashing it, over and over again, with bruised and bleeding hands.[72]

During these bouts of anger, Macdonald regularly refers to her readings on both falconry and grief.[73] Despite her previously stated intentions of shedding her academic side, she still retains portions of that all too rational (and human) mentality: it seems as if she is startled by her inability to curb grief, remaining almost unaware, or rather unwilling to succumb to the potential of trauma to shatter and exceed any plan or scheme.

Victims and survivors of trauma never take their acts of witnessing lightly, as they are often afraid of not being up to the task, or lucid enough to provide a coherent testimony.[74] The same could be said of Macdonald's case, except that here her testimony, her act of survival, does not only consist in a written account, but also in her decision to train Mabel. Her precarious psychological state and emotional exhaustion lead her to believe she is not doing a good job and that her project with the goshawk is ill-fated. This *impasse* is eventually broken when she finds the strength to open up to a friend and fellow falconer about her crippling fears.[75] After acknowledging her distress, both to herself and to third parties, Macdonald feels more relaxed and able to continue her work with Mabel, up to the point where the two reach such a degree of mutual trust that Mabel can now fly free.

There is, however, one last step to be completed: every *austringer* (i.e., every keeper of goshawks) has to help their hawks to hunt and kill. In other words, what Macdonald must help Mabel to do is to mingle with and ultimately cause death, the one thing she herself is running away from. There is a brilliant passage in which she voices her concerns, while also exposing the divide between human and animal:

Trained hawks didn't catch animals. They caught *quarry*. They caught *game*. What an extraordinary term. *Game*. I sat quietly watching the line and wondered. I would hunt with this hawk. Of course I would. Training a goshawk and not letting it hunt seemed to me like raising a child and not letting it play. But that was not why I needed her. To me she was bright, vital, secure in her place in the world. Every tiny part of her was boiling with life, as if from a distance you could see a plume of steam around her, coiling and ascending and making everything around her slightly blurred, so she stood out in fierce, corporeal detail. The hawk was a fire that burned my hurts away. There could be no regret or mourning in her. No past or future. She lived in the present only, and that was my refuge. My flight from death was on her barred and beating wings. But I had forgotten that the puzzle that was death was caught up in the hawk, and I was caught up in it too.[76]

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[72] H. MACDONALD, *H is for Hawk*, p. 141.

[73] "All the anger within me, the anger I didn't know was there, the anger the books call One of the Five Stages of Grief rears up in a towering instant of white-hot fury" (*ibidem*, p. 100).

[74] See S. FELMAN and D. LAUB, *Testimony*.

[75] "And the sun on the glass and the memory of the shining field, and the awful laughter, and the kindness of that morning's meeting must have thinned the armour of silence I'd worn for months, because the anger was quite gone now, and that evening as we drove to the hill, I said in a quiet voice, 'Stuart, I'm not dealing very well with things at the moment.' I said, 'I think I'm depressed.' 'You've lost your father, Helen,' he said. 'I'm training a gos. I suppose it's quite stressful.' 'You've *lost your father*. And you're doing OK with the gos,' he added. 'You might not see it, but you are. She'll be flying free, soon. She's nearly there, Helen. Don't be so hard on yourself.' I hadn't told him everything. […] But I had told him something" (H. MACDONALD, *H is for Hawk*, p. 151, emphasis in original).

[76] *Ibidem*, p. 160.

This moral conundrum triggers an emotional short circuit in Macdonald's mind. She admits having hunted with other hawks for years, but in the wake of her father's death she is no longer equipped with the same cold blood. At the same time, she is aware that by their nature hawks *must* hunt, and thus decides to go forward with her project and "let slip havoc and murder".[77] What happens when the two go hunting for the first time is described in terms of a pursued loss of control:

That is the lure: that is why we lose ourselves, when powerless from hurt and grief, in drugs or gambling or drink; in addictions that collar the broken soul and shake it like a dog. I had found my addiction on that day out with Mabel. It was as ruinous, in a way, as if I'd taken a needle and shot myself with heroin. I had taken flight to a place from which I didn't want to ever return.[78]

As Macdonald herself acknowledges in retrospective, hunting with Mabel took her "to the very edge of being a human. Then it took me past that place to somewhere I wasn't human at all".[79] Indeed, by being beside herself with both rage and grief, she has been inhabiting two sides and sensibilities: one more human, more civilised; the other closer to the wildness and state of nature of animals. However, each time she goes hunting with Mabel, she makes a small step towards the latter, getting closer and closer to a point of no return: "In hunting with Mabel, day after day, I had assumed – in my imagination, of course, but that was all it could ever be – her alien perspective, her *inhuman* understanding of the world. It brought something akin to madness, and I did not understand what I had done".[80]

It is here that the fallacy of Macdonald's plan becomes apparent, and her way of working through her grief reveals its problematic slant. If we understand *working through* as the phase subsequent to the acknowledging of a traumatic event as such, in which survivors slowly attempt to rebuild their life and begin a course of actions that may lead to their own self-healing,[81] we can easily see Macdonald doing the exact opposite. By expressing her desire to escape from human emotions and assuming the feral point of view of the goshawk, she is actually circumnavigating her own trauma. Training Mabel as a way of coping with her father's death may have a therapeutic effect, but this can only be temporary. Thinking as a raptor would surely allow a certain recess from experiencing grief in human terms, but Macdonald becomes so lost in the hawk's 'alien perspective' to almost forget that this behaviour cannot be assimilated into human interactions.

However, Macdonald is prompted to get back on a righteous path during the memorial service, where she meets people who had been in touch or worked with her father and who remind her of the warmth of human connections:

Hands are for other human hands to hold. They should not be reserved exclusively as perches for hawks. And the wild is not a panacea for the human soul; too much in the air can corrode it to nothing. […] I'd fled to become a hawk, but in my misery all I had done was turn the hawk into a mirror of me.[82]

[77] *Ibidem*, p. 175.
[78] *Ibidem*, p. 177.
[79] *Ibidem*, p. 195.
[80] *Ibidem*, p. 212.
[81] See D. LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*.
[82] H. Macdonald, *H is for Hawk*, pp. 217-18.

Macdonald's *inhuman* understanding of the world is, in clinical terms, the sign of a profound depression: in the wake of this realisation, she manages to seek help from a professional, so as to slowly re-enter her human frame. As she progresses with her treatment, she also becomes lucid enough to understand what happened with Mabel and why their relationship was on the brink of unhealthiness. At the beginning of the book, she had hinted at the hawk's ability to slip into "another, wilder world from which humans had been utterly erased".[83] And, later on, she is reminded of a Middle English poem from her college days, *Sir Orfeo*, in which hawks are depicted as crossing borders inaccessible to humans, thus rehashing the "ancient shamanic traditions right across Eurasia, [in which] hawks and falcons were seen as messengers between this world and the next".[84] At this point, Macdonald finally admits to having craved for this other world and having, in a sense, exploited Mabel: "I know now what those dreams in spring had meant, the ones of a hawk slipping through a rent in the air into another world. I'd wanted to fly with the hawk to find my father; find him and bring him home".[85]

As spring arrives, Macdonald must part from Mabel, because hawks usually spend the warmer seasons moulting in their aviaries. As she begins to say goodbye, she appears fully capable of reconfiguring their bond and ultimately treasuring what they have learned together:

In my time with Mabel I've learned how you feel more human once you have known, even in your imagination, what it is like to be not. And I have learned, too, the danger that comes in mistaking the wildness we give a thing for the wildness that animates it. Goshawks are things of death and blood and gore, but they are not excuses for atrocities. Their inhumanity is to be treasured because what they do has nothing to do with us at all.[86]

This remark bears some striking similarities with the *New York Times* piece mentioned earlier, the latter inevitably building from the former. Macdonald says she has learned (or rather, relearned) what it means to be human by confronting her own nature with Mabel's wildness. After briefly experiencing a dissolution of her humanity, she is finally able to separate herself from the goshawk. No longer trying to inhabit Mabel's subjectivity, she looks back at what they have accomplished together, recognising the scars on her hands as mementos of a year of arduous training. She also sees other scars that are not visible, the scars of her own grief that Mabel "helped mend, not make".[87] The way Mabel helped to mend Macdonald's bleeding, grieving scars is also testified by a brief episode in which she finds a previously unseen note written for her by her father. This discovery rekindles the theme of patience, and Macdonald's heartfelt reaction – now free from anger – shows how time "worked its careful magic",[88] for her grief has finally transformed into love.

5. *Hawk* was written roughly seven years after the events it deals with. At no time does this work hide its mainspring in the personal and complex trauma of loss, which rapidly becomes the driving force of the whole narrative, in terms of form as well as content.

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[83] *Ibidem*, p. 24.
[84] *Ibidem*, p. 226.
[85] *Ibidem*, p. 220.
[86] *Ibidem*, p. 275.
[87] *Ibidem*.
[88] *Ibidem*, p. 268.

The degree of instability generally ascribed to traumatic events, which are perceived as unspeakable and in excess of our frames of reference, is indeed mirrored in the book's structure and its resistance to generic categorisation. Macdonald feels unable to fully give her testimony by writing *only* a grief memoir, or *only* a record of her training with Mabel. Propelled by trauma, the final result rests in a hybrid text which resists any fixed or self-contained label[89] and which somehow embodies the slippery, out-of-reference nature of trauma itself.

Yet, as we have seen, this instability transcends the text itself. If we turn to the narrating subject, we discover a grieving orphan who decides to escape from the human world, hoping to find solace in nature while training her goshawk. *Hawk* details the author's progress step by step, with Mabel emerging as a fully-fledged and utterly captivating character and Macdonald comparing their story with T.H. White's experience with his male goshawk. Spending time with Mabel provides the author with the chance to de-emphasise her human conscience and temporarily embrace the hawk's feral perspective, in a desperate attempt to flee from grief. In other terms, throughout *Hawk*, Macdonald approaches the status of a hybrid subject herself, a wild and animal-like mind trapped inside a human shell.

Reading *Hawk* through the lenses of grief and trauma theory contributes to shedding light on Macdonald's achievement. Her book stages and narrates the experience of one's undoing in response to traumatic grief. The unpredictable transformations of which Butler speaks in her essay are related to processes of hybridisation that inform the book's structure and leave an imprint in the narrating autobiographical subject. As a consequence, the grieving process traced in *Hawk* is relentlessly on the edge, or rather, on multiple ones: on the edge of different genres without ever settling into a specific one; on the edges and fringes of civilised society and its rules of conduct for grieving; finally, on the edge of the tantalising divide between human and animal.

Thanks also to her reading of White and his disastrous attempt at projecting his own demons onto his hawk in order to exorcise them through an animal proxy, Macdonald is able to see that she had been mistaken about "those books about people running to the woods to escape their grief and sorrow".[90] Her hybrid condition, her desire to be free from grief as hawks allegedly are, does not translate well in the human world, given that she was frantically spiralling into severe depression in spite of herself. In the end, she manages to backtrack and reconfigure her relationship with Mabel, finding her humanity again by confronting with (i.e., distancing from) the goshawk's *inhuman* wildness.

A sense of artful reconstruction of the past is also at work in the closing pages of *Hawk*, where Macdonald ties things up with a neat ending which almost jars with the generic fluidity and overall instability flaunted up to this point. The book in fact ends with a reference to the author's changed mental state that, as an earthquake, wakes her up in the middle of the night. Concerned about Mabel, she precipitates down the stairs to check on her, only to find the animal calm and asleep: "right now Mabel is more than a hawk. She feels like a protecting spirit. […] I had thought the world was ending, but my hawk had saved me again, and all the terror was gone".[91]

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[89] Even the 'Nature Writing/Biography' label on the Vintage copy referenced in these pages sounds reductive as well as misleading.

[90] *Ibidem*, p. 224.

[91] *Ibidem*, p. 278.

Most importantly, Mabel reminds Macdonald of the value of human warmth, and it is precisely with this image of domestic comfort that the book closes. After driving to the Suffolk home of a friend who owns an aviary, Macdonald bids goodbye to Mabel for the spring months, and, in order to take her mind off the separation, her friend invites her to his kitchen, "where the kettle is whistling, and the house is very warm".[92]

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[92] *Ibidem*, p. 279.

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Fausto Ciompi

On Name Symbolism
in Caryl Phillips' *Crossing the River*

Abstract: *Crossing the River*, Caryl Phillips' 1993 acclaimed novel, tells three intertwined stories of slavery and de-humanization in which black men and white girls are mishandled, traded like goods, and exploited as unpaid labourers or objects of sexual pleasure by their white masters or husbands. An eloquent sign of human debasement is that, on Captain James Hamilton's ship, black slaves are nameless and identified only by numbers, but other rigid designators bear strong symbolical implications. This essay discusses the function of name symbolism in the text by taking into consideration people's and ship's denominations, as well as the name of some places.

Keywords: Caryl Phillips. *Crossing the River*. Name Symbolism. African Diaspora.

1. *An Unfiltered Semiosphere: Mythical Kinship and Historical Suffering*

I shall start by recalling Caryl Phillips' sensitiveness to the relevance of names. In a revealing statement about uncertain and failing identities, he once declared: "I remember back in 1979, during my final year as a student at Oxford, contemplating whether to take the low road toward a career as a writer, or stay on the academic high road and attempt to put some more initials after my name".[1]

Names are of the utmost importance also in *Crossing the River*, Caryl Phillips' 1993 novel on African diaspora, which circuitously tells the story of three characters – Nash, Martha and Travis – sold into slavery by their old mythical father because crops failed. The novel is narrated with continuous time-shifts that create a-chronological loops: time is circular and mythic, rather than linear and historical, and the four chapters of the novel are encircled by a Prologue and an Epilogue 'in heaven'. Chapter 3, "Crossing the River", presents the three characters together, while the other three chapters have one protagonist at a time. This responds to a fictional logic for which a mythical ancestor lives 250 years to see his three children act in either the eighteenth, nineteenth or twentieth century. In the eighteenth-century portion of the story, however, the three brothers become contemporary, and all of them are sold to Captain Hamilton.

Travis, the most eloquent of these speaking names, comes from the French 'traverser', which means 'to cross', an action to which the book title immediately draws our attention. In Chapter 4, Travis is an African-American GI who crosses the Atlantic and comes to Europe to fight in World War II. In Yorkshire he meets Joyce, a married white woman with whom he has a tender love affair. Not only does Travis cross the ocean, but he also moves across cultural and racial barriers. A black man, he approaches Joyce, a white woman, in

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[1] C. Phillips, "Stuart Hall", *Bomb*, 58, Winter 1997, p. 38.

her shop, invites her to a ball and woos her in a very courteous manner. Just like his brother Nash and his sister Martha, Travis is in fact a "limit-surpassing" character,[2] and this is a recurring feature in *Crossing the River*, a text in which, starting with the book title, mobility, whether physical or cultural, is a pivotal notion.

But before discussing mobility, let us define it in semiotic and cultural terms. According to Russian semiotician Jury Lotman, a narrative event is determined by the crossing of a boundary while the semiosphere is the result and the condition for the development of culture produced by the interaction of its "different substructures".[3] It is through the exchange of information (epistemic mobility) and through personal, social and ethnic interchange (anthropological mobility) that cultural systems (the semiosphere) define their homeostasis and develop. If we apply Lotman's perspective to *Crossing the River* we realise that, on the macro-cultural scale, it is because the likes of Travis *traverse* (that is, *cross*) the Atlantic that the semiosphere of democracy is spared the ultimate disastrous effects produced in Europe by the entropy of totalitarianism. But Phillips' text does not focus on the grand narratives of European history and geo-politics. Rather, the English section of *Crossing the River* is concerned with small-scale events. What the reader learns is that it is because Travis crosses the threshold of Joyce's shop in a neglected English town that the woman's name, which means 'joy' or 'happiness', does not sound entirely ironic at the end of the day.[4] It is in fact because of her affair with Travis that Joyce liberates herself from her mother's and her husband's different forms of tyranny and does experience some kind of happiness. Nor does happiness come across as the result of acts based on rigidly ethicised assumptions. Joyce's liberation from her mother is not just the consequence of her choice of what is good, but of her subconscious pursuit of what is desirable in terms of eroticised psychology. Joyce's love for Travis is boosted by obscure psychological drives. This emerges in the episode in which, first, Joyce puts flowers on her mother's tomb, and then goes to the movies with Travis in a theatre conveniently called 'Elektra Palace'. By choosing Travis as her partner – a soldier and an evident avatar of her father, who died fighting in the Great War – Joyce in fact punishes her mother, her psychosexual competitor, and resuscitates the ghost of her father, who returns from the otherworld as an Oedipal hero and the auratic bearer of masculine codes.

When Travis dies in Italy, Joyce entrusts their son, Greer, to the social services because she is too poor to support him. This duplicates the three children's sale into slavery on the part of their mythical father, but this time parent and child are eventually re-united. The

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[2] I borrow the notion of a limit-surpassing character from G. BOTTIROLI, "Frankenstein Rather Than Faust? The Decline of Limit-Surpassing Forces", *Enthymema*, 19, 2017, pp. 260-66.

[3] J. LOTMAN, "On the Semiosphere", *Sign Systems Studies*, 33 (1), 2005, pp. 205-29.

[4] The name 'Joyce' may also recall James Joyce, the prototype of the modernist diasporic author. Phillips' character is, incidentally, a strong reader and in the novel she acts as a link between the Western written tradition and the African oral heritage. See, on this point, A. DI MAIO, "Diasporan Voices in Caryl Phillips' *Crossing the River*", in H. WYLIE and B. LINDFORS (eds), *Multiculturalism and Hybridity in African Literatures*, Trenton, NJ, and Asmara, Africa World Press, 2000, p. 371. Phillips himself has emphasised the transcontinental turn of recent African literature: "As we move into the twenty-first century it's extremely exciting to see the growing numbers of African writers who are commenting with insight and authority on not only their own continent, but on Europe, and the Americas—in fact, on the world. I don't detect contemporary African writers extending much sympathy, or time, in the direction of diasporan individuals who are worried about what Africa means to them. And given the evidence of this diasporan musing, who can blame them" (C. PHILLIPS, "What Is Africa to Me Now?", *Research in African Literatures*, 46 [4], Winter 2015, p. 14).

fourth section of the novel, "Somewhere in England", ends with 18-year-old Greer paying his first visit to his unknown mother. The vicious circle of filial loss and separation is thus ultimately broken. The apparently endless travelling in space and time of uprooted personages comes to a halt. The words finally spoken by Joyce, actually the last words in her story and in the whole metadiegetic portion of the novel, are framed by the rhetorical figure of anadiplosis (the repetition of the same word or phrase at the beginning and at the end of a sentence), which reinforces the idea of the closing of a circle: "Sit down, please, sit down".[5] Eventually there is some peace and some rest in the existence of the wretched of the earth: a category that includes anyone, black or white, who has been abused by history or destiny. And it may be worth noticing that the living symbol of Joyce's liberation from male and matriarchal oppression is called Greer, possibly after Germaine Greer. A feminist icon and heroine of the women's liberation movement, Greer maintained that the West hates children and children revenge themselves by making them wards of the state when they grow too old:[6] a relationship that is ironically reversed in *Crossing the River*, where a deconstructed version of *Homo occidentalis* is presented in the shape of Martha's indulgent son. As argued by Bellamy, this is a core issue of *Crossing the River*:

What the reader initially carries away from *Crossing* is the dissonance between the father's affirmation of love for his children and the dire consequences of his abandonment of them as well as the multiplicity of responses to their plight. Phillips carefully constructs the text to offset the optimism of the epilogue by using the trauma of the core narratives. Rather than rendering triumph where there is none, he intentionally leaves the African father's descendants (as well as the reader) in an unresolved middle space between the tragedy of their initial abandonment and the triumph of a hoped-for but unrealized reconciliation. Shelly Rambo's theory of remaining suggests the possibility of inhabiting this middle space as a place of survival and witness. She defines remaining as living on "as a form of witness to the persistence of death in life" (Rambo 937).[7]

Let us now consider Nash Williams, the emancipated slave who is sent to Liberia by his master, Edward Williams, and by the American Colonization Society in order to convert the natives and contribute to their material and spiritual improvement. My contention is that the character is called Nash because the name means 'atten ash', that is, 'at the ash tree'[8] and contains the noun 'ash', two facts that forebode the nature of his end. As Madison, another liberated slave, puts it, Nash dies of fever and "is burned according to local custom" (p. 58). Ashes to ashes, as the biblical saying goes.

Biblical undertones also resonate in Martha's name. In Luke's Gospel, Martha is Mary

[5] C. PHILLIPS, *Crossing the River*, London, Vintage, 2006, p. 232. Further references from this edition are given after quotations in the text.

[6] This thesis is developed in G. GREER, *Sex and Destiny: The Politics of Human Fertility*, New York, Harper and Row, 1984.

[7] M. RICE BELLAMY, "Haunting the African Diaspora: Responsibility and Remaining in Caryl Phillips's *Crossing the River*", *African American Review*, 47 (1), Spring 2014, p. 130. The novel's ending thus suggests a radically different outcome from the typical black family narrative, in which the absence of fathers may lead to social maladaptation and family destruction. See, on this point, P. SMETHURST, "Postmodern Blackness and Unbelonging in the Works of Caryl Phillips", *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 37 (5), 2002, p. 10. For Phillips, the idea of absent fathers is a consequence of the effect on the psyche of a man of African origin, who under slavery, had his children taken away from him by the master, acting as head of the family. This, suggests Phillips, "induces an irresponsibility" which may lead to the disruption of the black family.

[8] C. HOUGH and D. IZDEBSKA (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Names and Naming*, Oxford, OUP, 2016, p. 243.

and Lazarus' sister. When Jesus visits their house and resuscitates Lazarus, Martha pre-
pares food and makes all the required practical preparations, while her sister listens to
Jesus' teachings and enjoys the pleasures of spiritual illumination. Mary has chosen the
one needful thing and "that good part, which shall not be taken away from her".[9] Like her
evangelical archetype, Martha Randolph is a hard worker and wins her bread in Dodge
City, Kansas, by cooking and doing laundry work for poor labourers. She also buys her
journey to California by offering her services as a cook to black pioneers, who eventually
abandon her in Colorado when toil and fatigue have nearly killed her. In her silent specula-
tions, when she is fleeing from slave traders in Virginia, Martha wishes she possessed her
husband's passion: "Lord, give me Lucas' voice" (p. 80), with words that may sound as a
request for Luke the Evangelist's eloquence in order to adequately express her intolerable
pain. However, Martha's destiny is to die unknown to everybody in Colorado (incidentally,
a suitable name for the burial site of a coloured slave). Here, Martha suffers the ultimate
outrage of being buried unnamed, which is a sad return to her original condition of slave,
because the first step in the depersonalisation of slaves was the taking away of their name
and its substitution with an assigned denomination chosen by the slavemaster.

Just like the correspondent character in Luke's Gospel, Phillips' Martha is actually
complemented by one Mary: her daughter Eliza Mae. Mae is, in fact, a diminutive of Mary.
At least in Martha's imagination, Eliza Mae has taken 'the good part' just like the evan-
gelical Mary. In her delirious daydreaming Martha is satisfied that her daughter lives in
California, the earthly paradise Martha also aspires to reach but which she will never see.
In Martha's visions, California is a land of plenty where Eliza leads a wealthy and respected
existence. Like the Eliza made famous by George Bernard Shaw, Eliza Mae has met a Pyg-
malion who taught her the manners of an educated middle-class woman. She is married
to a schoolteacher and has generated three children. But to Martha's distress, she is now
called Cleo, that is, Cleopatra, the name of a pagan queen which sounds too voluble and
undignified to the old woman, who evidently believes Eliza's new identity is not respectful
of her Christian lineage.[10]

2. *Four Villains: Full-blooded and Otherwise*

The villain in the story is obviously vicious captain James Hamilton, the slavedriver. If in
his surname we look for what Jean Starobinski calls 'words under words', we realise that
the captain's family name contains the phrase: AM IL(L) TON, which might be re-shuffled

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[9] LUKE, 10: 2, *King James Version Online*, https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Luke-Chapter-10/#38
(last accessed on 10 July 2020).

[10] A different interpretation of Martha, seen as a sign of Phillips' critique of Christian axiology, is provided in
T. ASHFORD CARTER, "Signifying (Non)Linguistic and Subliminal Spirituality: Caryl Phillips' *Crossing the River*",
Ariel: A Review of International English Literature, 45 (1-2), January-April 2014, pp. 250-51: "Phillips further
complicates black female subjectivity by using the duality of Western signification versus African American
signifying to create particular fragmentations of cultural and religious identity. *Crossing the River* is reminiscent
of the Du Boisian notion of double consciousness, which asserts a dichotomised awareness for black Americans,
and Homi K. Bhabha's notion of unhomeliness, which refers to the multiple and yet nonexistent citizenships
of the postcolonial subject and connotes a particular dislocating aspect of that identity: Phillips demonstrates
how dominant Western Judeo-Christian ideology may hamper the black female subject's ultimate search for
psychological/emotional wholeness".

as "I am ill", and even "ill in enormous amount", a *ton* being "a unit of internal capacity for ships equal to 100 cubic feet".[11] The truly disquieting side of Hamilton's character is that he represents evil in an upgraded form. While his father was a brutal slavedriver who earned himself a devilish reputation through the unspeakable deeds he committed, James embodies slavedriving with a human face. Although he ruthlessly exploits the natives, he struggles to make himself acceptable to well-thinking Christians and respectable families. A fierce tyrant on his ship, James Hamilton exercises his autocratic power on both sailors and slaves with inflexible cruelty, but in the intervals of his cold administration of authority he writes sentimental letters to his wife in which he yearns for the pleasures of sweet marital love and the middle-class heaven of family life. He is the living demonstration that slavedriving is part of the well-mannered, well-meaning, self-indulgent capitalism, which has easily solved the problem of reconciling slavery with theology, genocide with peace of mind, entrepreneurial efficiency with sanctimonious ethics.[12] In the eighteenth century, pro-slavery Western culture had since long metabolised the contradiction caused by the clash of religious morals with slavery by reading selectively Christian tradition, and, in particular, St Paul's epistles. For instance, in the epistle to Titus, Paul admonishes his addressee as follows: "Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again".[13] And that Paul's doctrine, with all its ambiguity, is at the basis of Nash's Christian mission in Africa is recollected by the fact that in Liberia he settles up Saint Paul's river.

Another villain, if we may grant her this elevated status, is Amelia, Edward Williams' wife. Just like James Hamilton and Edward himself, Amelia is part of that power which eternally wills good and eternally works evil. The trouble is that, in actuality, the good which all of these characters will consists of the arbitrary universalisation of the received values established by the ruling white classes. Amelia is much concerned with respectability and marital fidelity, two perfectly decent notions in the society of her time. She is jealous of her husband and steals the letters which Nash the African missionary sends Edward, his former master and lover in America. By doing so, deceptive Amelia causes the failure of Nash's enterprise in Liberia because he does not receive the moral and material support he requests from Edward and which was badly needed in order to survive in a hostile context. It is no fluke, then, that the name of Amelia the wily pretender is the perfect anagram of "Am a lie". Amelia is shocked by Edward's homosexuality, infidelity, and interracial sexual relationships, but her prudish respectability persuades her to tolerate it and keep lying in the face of the world. When Nash is sent to Africa, she is satisfied that all the filth and indecency have gone with him and everything may be dumped into oblivion and unconsciousness. But the repressed returns in the form of Nash's letters, which she hides for several

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[11] "It is [also] interesting to note that Phillips chose for his fictional slave ship captain the name of the third mate in Newton's journal, a name whose last syllable (-ton) echoes Newton's name" (V. GUIGNERY, "Pastiche, Collage, and Bricolage: Caryl Phillips' Hybrid Journal and Letters of a Slave Trader in *Crossing the River*", *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, 49 [2-3], April-July 2018, p. 145). Guignery also co-edited, with C. GUTLEBEN, "*Traversée d'une œuvre:* Crossing the River *de Caryl Phillips*", *Cycnos*, 32 (1), 2016.

[12] For an alternative interpretation, see A. WARD, "Caryl Phillips: The Absent Voices of History", in EAD., *Caryl Phillips, David Dabydeen, and Fred D'Aguiar: Representations of Slavery*, Manchester, Manchester U.P., 2011, p. 53, in which Captain Hamilton's "loneliness and capacity to love" are seen as means of "complicating his characterization".

[13] TITUS, 2: 9, *King James Version,* https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Titus-2-9/ (last accessed on 10 September 2020).

years. And when she finds out that Edward's passion for young slaves is far from spent, she is eventually overcome and takes her own life: her own way to destroy permanently the dirt and shame she has vainly tried to sweep under the carpet.

The third villain in the story is Len, Joyce's husband in "Somewhere in England". Len is short for Leonard. It is an ironic name because it comes from an Old German word meaning 'lion' ('Lewenhart') and from the Latin 'Leo', although Len is anything but brave or lion-hearted. He does not join the army because he is disabled. He is just a member of the Local Defence Volunteers, or 'Look Duck Vanish', as local people call them. He cowardly beats Joyce in order to work "off the embarrassment of not having a uniform" and because he can thus play "at being a man" (p. 159).

The next character to be considered is Edward Williams. Actually not a full-blooded villain, Edward is a morally ambiguous character. His psychological and moral duplicity is visually expressed in a telling description of his face, shown as split in two parts, while he is seeking some rest in a wooden hut in Africa: "Half of Edward's face lay shrouded in thick shadow, the other one changed hue and shape according to the nature of the dancing flame" (p. 68).

The name 'Edward' is of Anglo-Saxon origin and means 'guardian of wealth'. Edward's wealth comes from the exploitation of slavery in his tobacco plantation, but, as an illuminated exponent of progressive thinking, he frees slaves and encourages them to get a Christian education and become missionaries in Africa. A fact that, as the narrator clarifies, is conveniently instrumental in boosting his business. In the surname 'Williams', on the other hand, we detect two overlapping and contradictory phrases: WILL I AM and ILL I AM, which confirm the duplicity of the character. In fact, to his slaves Edward is a Father, someone invested with a sort of Divine authority ("good will" and "Godwill" are expressions which occur several times in the text, and Edward is obviously a king's name). But, at the same time, he is 'someone profoundly ill', and not only in terms of physical health as when he gets sick while journeying to Africa. Edward personifies what Vladimir Jankélévitch called "bad conscience".[14] His sickness represents the bad conscience of the Western world torn between the duty of Christian charity on the one hand and the brutal praxis of Colonialism on the other. His conscience is tormented by "a profound guilt" (p. 529) and he vainly hopes to cleanse it by bringing his abstract idealism close to the actual life of people in the flesh. But when he gets to Nash's place in Africa, he finds out that his abstract idealism and detachment from reality have reduced his former lover into ashes. Edward thought he could send freed slaves to colonise Africa, "encouraging men to engage with a past and a history that are truly not their own" (p. 529). But he simply succeeds in transforming the colonised into a coloniser, and then, as in a typical atavistic reversion, the coloniser into a native. Edward's separation from the actuality of history is evident at the end of his story, when he sings a Christian Hymn in memory of Nash and thus proves to be no more than "a strange old white man" (p. 70), an alien presence in Africa, unrecognised both by natives and by Madison, his former slave.

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[14] V. JANKÉLÉVITCH, *The Bad Conscience*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2014.

3. *Ship Names: Embarking the West's Grand Narrative of Power*

James Hamilton's ship is called the *Duke of York*, an obviously colonialist denomination and a link to Yorkshire, the setting of "Somewhere in England". Another evidently imperialist name is that of the ship which in 1820 carries Nash to Africa: it is called the *Elizabeth*. But this vessel's denomination also conveys some religious nuances because 'Elizabeth' means "My God is an oath" or "My God is abundance". In fact, Nash leaves for Africa under the aegis of Edward's God-like Will and with a promise of wealth to be gained: "under the protection of a wise God, who promises to be a God of all nations" (p. 26). But, as we have seen, no promise is kept by Nash's white father, Edward Williams, nor does Nash succeed in the colonisation of the desolate portion of Africa he elects as home.

An ironic inversion of meaning is interestingly suggested by the names of another two ships: the *Mercury* and the *Mathilda*. Edward Williams, the militant Christian, journeys to Africa on board the *Mercury*, a ship called after the winged messenger of pagan gods in Greek mythology. This ironically suggests that, despite his Christian faith, Edward lives like a pagan, surrounded by slaves and male favourites. But, more evidently, it stresses that he is a messenger of Western civilization: an unfit one, who in fact falls ill as soon he gets in touch with the harsh reality of Africa's climate.

On the contrary, one of Nash's letters from pagan Africa travels on the ship *Mathilda*, whose denomination recalls the heroine with the same name who appears in Dante's Eden. In his letter, Nash complains because he cannot get in touch with Edward, just like Dante in Canto XXVIII of the Purgatory complains because he cannot cross the river that separates him from Mathilda, the lovely woman who represents primeval beauty: a kind of beauty that was only possible before the Fall of man. As suggested by Nash himself, the ship *Mathilda* departs from a sort of Eden, a "Liberian paradise" (p. 62), a land to which he was expelled by his Father after Edward used him for his purposes. In Dante's Purgatory, Mathilda is an allegory of forgetfulness and of the memory of good deeds, which are dispensed by two rivers: respectively the Lethe and Eunoe. In this perspective, the ship's name evokes both Edward's forgetfulness of his former lover and *protégé* and his failure in the strengthening of Nash's good deeds and intentions.

4. *Trans-historical Voices: Recurrent Names, Recurring Phrases*

A final consideration on names may concern their return in different spaces and times. For instance, in the nineteenth-century story titled "The Pagan Coast", Nash Williams marries Sally Travis, a woman from Georgia, whose family name becomes the Christian name of a GI in the twentieth-century tale told in "Somewhere in England". Symmetrically, in this same story Joyce meets one "old Williams", who shares his surname with Edward and a plethora of slaves liberated by him, including Nash and Madison, all of them from "The Pagan Coast". This suggests the interchangeability of people and events, and reinforces a sense of trans-historical brotherhood, an 'eternal return of the same', whose circularity is also expressed by the narrative structure of the novel.

As has been noted, in fact, events in *Crossing the River* are arranged in non-chronological, non-linear succession. This is because the past, as reconstructed by memory, is always incomplete, fractured and untotalised. At the same time, the past is not meaningless. The

history of human sufferings is not vain. Furthermore, the novel's epilogue breaks this circularity. In the novel's ending, circularity is first suggested through the repetition of sentences from the prologue's *incipit*: "A desperate foolishness. The crops failed. I sold my children" (p. 1). Then, it is denied by Captain Hamilton's notes on slave trade: "A desperate foolishness. The crops failed. I sold my children. *Bought 2 strong man-boys, and a proud girl*. But they arrived on the bank of the river, loved" (p. 237; emphasis added). In the final "many-tongued chorus of common memory", even James Hamilton's entry into his journal may find place. His is the voice of history, which is added to that of myth: the painful memory of slavery is juxtaposed with the cold, historical record of merciless slavedriving. Carefully avoiding the 'rhetoric of blame', the text's ending subscribes to a polyphony of experiences and values. The last sentence ("But they arrived on the bank of the river, loved") is inclusive and conciliatory. As Derek Walcott would put it, Phillips exhorts to look ahead, but he also seems to suggest we ought do so only when the past is adequately understood and kept alive to the present through the deconstruction of power dichotomies[15] and a meticulous elaboration of memory.

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[15] In Ledent's words, by "re-entering European history from the point of view of those who have usually been eclipsed from it, Phillips makes a clear political gesture which challenges cultural essentialism, ethnic purity and political correctness" (B. LEDENT, "'Overlapping Territories, Intertwined Histories': Cross-Culturality in Caryl Phillips's *Crossing the River*", *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 30 [1], 1995, p. 61).

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ANNA ROCCHI

The Freeing Violation:
A Quantum Approach to Planetary Healing in Margaret Atwood's Trilogy

Abstract: In Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003-2013), rhetoric fulfils a thematic role and even exerts a sort of supremacy over the decisive role played by its scientific counterpart ('word person' vs. 'numbers person'). The balance of power is well represented by the specularity of the couple Adam/Crake. A mirroring of qualities – showing a continuum rather than a divide – is ubiquitous among the characters. Oxymorons, in particular, are like a *fil rouge* leading towards a crucial point of reversal of perspectives and values, a hidden level where antinomian couples reveal their secret union and complex interplay, such as science and religion, dystopia and utopia, outer appearances and the inner fabric of matter. References and suggestions coming from quantum theory can provide a unifying pattern and new keys to decipher the arabesque of fictional reality and possibly speculate about real developments. The magician "Slaight of Hand", another of Adam's doubles, obliquely evokes the greater illusionism at work in the phenomenal world – Māyā, as it was called in ancient India – and sets out to divert our attention from the crucial spots where meaningful action takes place. In Atwood's trilogy, private revenge and more general bio-ecological motivations favouring non-human forms of life converge so as to end the Anthropocene via a mass genocide and unscrupulous genetic practices. Yet, once the game changer is reached, all masterminds at work will lose their grip on the course of events, thus paving the way for the secret roots of existence to overturn old binomial patterns and establish new equilibriums.

Keywords: Utopia. Dystopia. Oxymoron. Quantum physics. Genetics. Extinction.

1. *The Dystopian/Utopian Continuum*

In the multi-faceted panorama of contemporary utopian/dystopian fiction, often set in a post-apocalyptic world, possible developments are explored in relation to a not-too-distant future and too shadowy elements in our civilisation which are further complicated by the advances of techno-sciences. The fictional form allows the simulation, in an imaginary world, of the quick ripening of those germs which, if left to their own logic, may cause great damage to various living forms, if not the complete destruction of life on our planet. Given its speculative potential and its propensity to highlight social exclusion, the dystopian genre may be approached as a sort of exorcist writing and as a way to go beyond recurring mental patterns, established trends and behavioural roles that are mainly taken for granted, if not actually codified in the DNA, as those aligned with biological essentialism might contend.[1] The latter is actually a treacherous field, especially when considered

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[1] This is especially true for the rules and roles related to gender issues, implicitly assigning a subordinate and inferior status to women, who in the anthropocentric, patriarchal society are relegated to impersonating the reflected image of the 'other', so as to confirm the male's leading role. Genetic essentialism usually strengthens this cultural frame of mind.

in relation to gender themes, but it also conveys effective metaphors for the exploration of otherness and the hybridisation of species.

Approaches are multiple and ever-evolving. Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini emphasise the contrastive quality of the utopian/dystopian genre provided by the adjective 'critical'[2] placed before the noun that categorises it, which ties in with the postmodern trend towards self-reflection and with the concept of 'critical mass' required to trigger a reversal of perspectives. The latter is further expanded by Dunja Mohr[3] by pointing at the process of dissolving the binary and oppositional logics typical of the anthropocentric approach. Margaret Atwood herself has contributed to the debate by creating the word *ustopia*, in which utopia and dystopia are combined to express the idea that "each contains a latent version of the other".[4] Atwood has also defined her own fiction as 'speculative', meaning that it shows possible and plausible outcomes of the current eco-social planetary situation. For her part, Donna Haraway speaks of 'speculative fabulation', explained as a way to weave together the creative aspects of imagination and the formalisms of scientific practice.[5]

What generally emerges is the awareness of a utopian/dystopian continuum consisting of a flux of interchanging positions, likely to show unexpected twists. Dystopian and utopian elements might thus be linked at the root, as two faces of the same reality, with the value judgement much depending on the observer's position, as Atwood herself points out.[6] In the *MaddAddam* trilogy we are thus confronted by multiple, unstable combinations of aspects, tending to engender contradictions and paradoxes in a kaleidoscopic manner. Bianca Del Villano points out how the textual palimpsest of the trilogy is rich in 'implicatures' on the level of the characters' enunciations, which constantly heighten the degree of complexity.[7] And indeed this feature, also extended to figural rendition, enhances the overall speculative potential of the whole text, conceived as a complex communication act.[8] This makes it

[2] R. BACCOLINI and T. MOYLAN, "Introduction: Dystopia and Histories", in EAD., ID. (eds), *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, New York and London, Routledge, 2003, p. 2.

[3] Dunja Mohr speaks of "feminist transgressive [rather than critical] utopian dystopias" as tending to dissolve established binary logics and embrace multiplicity and fluidity. This evolution of utopia meets the feminist search for alternative paths, able to transcend patriarchal and humanistic schemas at the root of the mistakenly universal discourse. See D. MOHR, "Transgressive Utopian Dystopias: The Postmodern Reappearance of Utopia in the Disguise of Dystopia", *Zeitscrift für Anglistik und Americanistik. A Quarterly of Language, Literature and Culture*, 55 (1), 2007, p. 5.

[4] M. ATWOOD, *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination*, London, Hachette Digital, Little, Brown Book Group, 2011, p. 66. The concept of the two sides of the coin, introduced here, is applied extensively in the trilogy.

[5] D. HARAWAY, *SF: Speculative Fabulation and String Figures*, Ostfildern, Hatje Cantz, 2012, Ebook. Donna Haraway considers *sf* as the "material semiotic sign" for many forms of fiction, such as speculative fabulation, speculative feminism, science fiction, but also including the scientific discourse and string figures: the latter is seen as the locus of an encounter between theoretical and practical abilities. Speculative fabulation would thus be a praxis for creating models of *worlding* in the utopian 'Terrapolis', seen as "a niche space for a multispecies becoming-with".

[6] M. ATWOOD, *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination*, pp. 66-67.

[7] B. DEL VILLANO, "Pragmatica e genere. La ustopia ecocritica di Margaret Atwood", *Prospero. Rivista di letterature e culture straniere*, 22, 2017, p. 199 ff., https://www.openstarts.units.it/bitstream/10077/17426/9/Prospero_Del_Villano.pdf (last accessed on 31 December 2020).

[8] Paola Avella recommends applying extensively the tools of pragmatics to the interpretation of literary texts and to figurality, a domain where inferential ability is required for decoding symbols and metaphors. Inference is here often of a non-syllogistic kind, that is, with no guarantee regarding its indisputability. See P. AVELLA, "Il ruolo della pragmatica nell'interpretazione del testo letterario", *ACME. Annali della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia dell'Università degli Studi di Milano*, 65 (1), gen.-apr. 2012, pp. 274-77.

increasingly difficult to separate what is advisable and 'good' from its opposite, the utopian goal from the dystopian scenario. Miles away from the classical utopia seen as a universal 'blueprint of perfection', all we can do is try and catch the glimpses of a desirable dream.

In Atwood's trilogy, the desirable and the undesirable merge at a certain level and are prone to offer hybrid combinations that open the way to multiple planes of evaluation. Hybridisation is indeed a pervasive figure in terms of lexical (with many newly-formed lemmas), fictional and stylistic choices. In particular, the oxymoron may be the *fil rouge* capable of leading us through the texts' serpentine path, signalling that we are approaching a crucial junction and that reversals are likely to occur, as we shall see through the textual analysis. At one point, one of the main grudges held by various dissidents against the technocratic society will lay the groundwork for different interpretative perspectives. The corporate groups that represent an extreme involution of capitalism are morally condemned for encroaching on living forms, manipulating at will their genomic configuration. However, this very practice ultimately offers the opportunity to overcome species barriers and establish startlingly new forms of dialogue and cooperation, not only going beyond the ecologically-committed point of view – mainly held by Jimmy's mother and the God's Gardeners – but somehow supplying the tools to bridge the divides inherent in the anthropocentric system.

In these dystopian narratives characterised by a utopian veining, the backdrop – both a pre- and a post-apocalyptic one – is enriched by a discourse about the interrelations between science and religion as factors capable of determining the paths of civilisation. Biotechnology (including genetics) and spiritual-subversive stirrings, spreading in a society that is close to its dramatic breaking point, are like forces at work in a chequered *tableau*. They are about to cause a systemic collapse followed by a new course for humanity, in a context where genetic adjustments have been made to rectify the destructive inclinations from a previous stage. The interfacing of these dynamic polarities, blended with gender themes, is here foregrounded through the dynamics between science – aiming at a mediatic and economic control – and the God's Gardeners, who follow a sectarian ideology loaded with ecological and biblical echoes. Adam One, their leader, is the champion of the defence of natural life against lucrative genetic handlings and exploitation. These are two centres of power which, by secretly colluding, are to lead to the final crisis, alongside a course of events that reminds us of the recurrence of evolutionary/involutional phases throughout the civilisation process.

In short, in Atwood's dystopian society two utopian nuclei emerge, whose leaders – Adam One and Glenn, *alias* Crake – create the 'algorithms' underlying their respective visions. The scientific one operates in line with the Compounds' technocratic power and is constituted by some rebellious fringes led by Crake, the brilliant scientist responsible for ending and restarting civilisation via a newly-engineered humanoid species called the 'Crakers', after his nickname.[9] Instead, the eco-religious one, started by Adam One in opposition to the main autocratic trend, is based in the "pleeblands"[10] and is characterised by a strategy that is only allegedly naive. Both groups aim to save life on earth in the broadest sense by re-establishing an Edenic situation. In Adam's and Glenn's utopic projects, which

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[9] Crake is the name adopted by Glenn in the interactive online game called Extinctathon: "Adam named the living animals, MaddAddam names the dead ones" (M. ATWOOD, *Oryx and Crake*, London, Hachette Digital, Little, Brown Book Group, [2003] 2009, p. 92. All further references will be given in the text and associated with the acronym *OaC*).

[10] The free, inhabited part of the world not enclosed or protected. Conversely, the Compounds are separated, privileged enclosures for higher members of the corporations and scientists.

are probably two faces of a single theoretical plan, one can find traces of the individual mind that first conceived the original blueprint (Adam's) and induced others to align to its goals, timings, and procedures.

In *MaddAddam*, the third novel, the intentions of the two leaders who sparked the crisis (Adam and Glenn) are no longer relevant. They both die after accomplishing their mission and, in the new interspecies equilibrium, their original visions are only partially fulfilled, owing to unexpected adjustments to their plan: as a matter of fact, most members of the new 'hyper-hybrid race' who is coming along spring from the mating between old humans and Crakers.[11] We might be tempted to consider Adam's position as aligned with a revised form of humanism, while Glenn would be firmly against anthropocentrism. In fact, Adam is committed to readjusting the role of humanity in a biblical framework, giving it a new ecological sense. In Bianca del Villano's words, he seeks to favour the 'biosphere' by using the discursive tools provided by the "semiosphere", thus conciliating the two dimensions on a theological and practical plane.[12] In one of his speeches, he celebrates man's naming of the other animals, an act at the basis of the humanistic view and to be considered as the foundation of verbal discourse and human predominance over nature. On the other hand, Glenn plans and manages to dethrone the human race from its privileged status, providing its successors with an in-built capacity to adjust to the environment, as wild species do, and ensuring that the so-called 'higher brain functions' would be disactivated: his action is definitely against the semiosphere, since he gives preference to wild nature as opposed to human culture. Given his goal, he might even be described as anti-utopian, for, ultimately, if someone cannot fulfil his own desire (apart from surviving) due to lack of creativity, what would the value of life be? Such is the blind alley his vision would lead into and – if he had not miscalculated (in fictional reality, of course) – the greatest contradiction of it.

As far as the religious sect is concerned, beyond our assessment of Adam's values, the overall tenor of the God's Gardeners' propositions should be considered. They might also be looked upon as an 'assemblage of contents' strategically aimed at furthering a plausible message while covering the hidden workings of its members – that is, the ruling class – as opponents to the power system. From this point of view, we might guess that there is a part of Adam's ploy that is not publicly proclaimed, which is pursued through methods that are not so harmless. Indeed, he verges on a manipulative style by exerting a covert influence so as to induce others to cooperate in his main design, as we will see more in detail.

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[11] As Dunja Mohr acutely observes, the Crakers' voices, previously assembled in a choral *we*, become more differentiated as they learn to write and think as individuals. See D. MOHR, "Eco-Dystopia and Biotechnology: Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and *MaddAddam* (2013)", in E. VOIGTS and A. BOLLER (eds), *Dystopia, Science Fiction, Post-Apocalypse. Classics – New Tendencies – Model Interpretations*, Trier, WVT, 2015, p. 296. See also pp. 283-89 for some literary biotechnological implications and the exploration of alternative relations between species which surpass old binarisms.

[12] B. DEL VILLANO, "An Ecocritical Retelling of the Bible: Genesis and Apocalypse in Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*", *Textus. English Studies in Italy*, 3, 2014, pp. 162-64. Del Villano makes reference to a divide between various ecocritical positions: there are those who maintain that the idea of nature is filtered and constructed by discourse – identifying it with the *semiosphere* – and those who remind us that the real nature, aka the *biosphere*, the domain which materially supports life on earth, is not touched by this post-structuralist reasoning and continues to suffer. A third current – possibly closer to Atwood's ideas – considers our existence as shaped by the semiosphere, as the ensemble of signs and semiotic systems, but also tries to direct discourse towards the necessities of the biosphere, accepting the interdependence between them.

2. *Adam versus Crake: Diverging Confluences*

Critical attention has generally focused on Crake's plan, since it is carried out to the extreme extent of a mass genocide along with the replacement of the human race by a new 'edited model', purged of the damaging inclinations to violence and to domination over other species. At the same time, at least in the scientist's intention, this new model is also bereft of spiritual, aesthetical, and creative faculties – which has proven faulty, as we know that the Crakers will express symbolic, artistic, and ritual-oriented tendencies. The Paradice dome, where the humanoids were genetically engineered by Crake, is significantly compared to a "blind eyeball" (*OaC*, p. 349) and dominates its enclosure, like an image hinting at science's disembodied vision, imposing its own version of the truth as gained from a detached perspective. Glenn's authoritative stance might then be assimilated to the "cyclopean, self-satiated eye of the master subject",[13] thus occupying an outstanding position from which the non-isomorphic subjects and areas are necessarily excluded. This is then a deceptively clear vision, editing reality according to its own parameters while claiming to be scientifically objective. We might then say – borrowing Deleuze's terminology – that both utopian masters belong to the arborescent genealogy even while they are working to subvert anthropocentric schemas of thinking to establish a more "rhizomatic"[14] style by promoting interspecies justice, overcoming the logic of profit and the exclusion of the weakest subjects.[15] In fact, neither leader renounces authoritative principles or hierarchical organisation. It seems that their vision is somehow flawed.

Glenn is the one who actually puts an end to Anthropocene as the clear-headed and unemotional executioner of humanity – as Ernst Bloch notes, many utopian figures are endowed with a paranoid personality structure[16] – but Adam One might be regarded as the real initiator of the process and the hidden mastermind who orchestrates it, even though, at one point, the process evolves by following powerful inner drives. Glenn's personality is offset by that of his pal, Jimmy, but his real double is Adam One, whose character acquires full roundedness in the last two novels. We know Glenn from Jimmy's point of view, in *Oryx and Crake*, and we have a portrait of Adam through his brother's account in *MaddAddam*. Zeb's personality is quite the reverse of Adam's, as Jimmy's might be seen in relation to Glenn's. These fictional couples might be considered as variations of an arche-

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[13] D. HARAWAY, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privileges of Partial Perspectives", *Feminist Studies*, 14 (1), 1988, p. 586.

[14] The rhizomatic idea of thought is a figuration developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and works as an alternative to the arborescent model; while the latter is vertical and hierarchical and based on genealogies, the former expands horizontally in many directions, interconnecting multiple realities. In Atwood's trilogy there are slight hints at this conception. See G. DELEUZE and F. GUATTARI, "Rhizome", in IID., *Capitalisme et schizophrénie 2: Mille Plateaux*, Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, 1980, pp. 1-15.

[15] The traditional binomials, such as nature/culture, organic/*anorganic* [*sic*], human/animal are further destabilised by the recent post/trans-human trend (Haraway, Hayles, Moravec, and others). On the extension of the concept of social justice to the categories of gender, race, and species, see D. MOHR, "'When Species Meet': Beyond Posthuman Boundaries and Interspeciesism – Social Justice and Canadian Speculative Fiction", *Zeitschrift für Kanada-Studien*, 37, 2017, pp. 44-49.

[16] E. BLOCH, *The Principle of Hope*, Engl. trans. N. PLAICE, S. PLAICE, and P. KNIGHT, Oxford, Blackwell, (1954) 1986, p. 144. It has not gone unnoticed that Crake's studies department was called "Asperger's U" ("for the high percentage of brilliant weirdos", *OaC*, p. 227), thus introducing the suspicion of mild autistic and compulsive disorders in the young scientist's personality.

typal model derived from hypotexts such as Cervantes's *Don Quixote* and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, made up of antithetical personalities, each acting in conformity with certain recognisable patterns of behaviour.[17]

However, there are other aspects here at work, making the picture more complex. Namely, Glenn is a 'numbers person', while his companion is a 'word person'. Zeb is a man of action, a warrior skilled in informatics, while Adam is the spiritual leader, skilled in handling language and rhetorical strategies. By reading closely, we can detect in this foursome a sort of chiasm figure: in the first couple, it is the 'numbers person' who has the leading role, while in the other one, the boss is the 'word person'. But, considering Adam and Glenn together, we might say that the word-expert, Adam One, paves the way for Glenn, subtly inducing the brilliant scientist to implement the realisation of his own vision by providing the genetic expertise required to give lasting shape to a new order. Actually, as Bianca Del Villano points out,[18] Glenn also expresses, from time to time, a vision based on the awareness of the linguistic level, as when he dismisses the idea of God as an illusion provided by grammatical structures, while Adam gives Him a theoretical status founded on the concept of 'no-thingness' ("God is indeed the No-thing, the No-thingness").[19] Adam, at least at an overt level, tries to reform mythology and culture from the inside by updating biblical teachings, while Crake's answers to the God-quest consist in simplifying and flattening language by acting directly at the genetic level, besides erasing human culture with a view to saving the planet. But their theoretical positions regarding ultimate realities – being in a complementary relation to one another, i.e., embracing absence vs. discarding it – are inextricably connected, as the narrative outcomes show.

It has already been noticed that there are unexpected correspondences between the God's Gardeners and the Crakers. I would say that the new humanoids might seem the *genomic fixation* of certain behavioural and ideological traits of the members of Adam's sect. The blueprint common to both groups comes to the fore by comparing the cultural self-imposed ways of one group with the biologically dictated ones of the other. Let us look, for instance, at their way of dressing. The monastic style of the God's Gardeners and the guileless nudity of the Crakers amount to the same result, that is, nullifying eroticism. Glenn has indeed contrived to reduce women's sexuality to a seasonal oestrogenic flaring up (once every three years!) aimed at procreation, in a communal group experience to be consumed in a foursome with joyful exuberance.[20] In this polyandric system, the woman chooses among the males who offer flowers to woo her, but she cannot decline the offer and simply stay alone, escaping the duty of procreation, and this is quite an ambiguous way of establishing

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[17] See F. CIOMPI, *Conrad. Nichilismo e alterità*, Pisa, ETS, 2012, pp. 26-27. Zeb and Jimmy are situated at the more practical end of the spectrum and are committed to accomplishing the projects devised by Adam and Glenn, who are elusive and extraordinarily gifted. As with the Marlow/Kurtz couple, in *Heart of Darkness*, Jimmy and Zeb are the narrators of the others' story and feel in a way obliged to preserve their memory, even if both Jimmy and Zeb, at a certain point, will feel deceived by their companions and will try to gain autonomy, thus relatively freeing themselves from the others' influence.

[18] B. DEL VILLANO, "An Ecocritical Retelling of the Bible: Genesis and Apocalypse in Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*", pp. 158-59.

[19] M. ATWOOD, *The Year of the Flood*, London, Hachette Digital, Little, Brown Book, (2009) 2010, p. 61. All further references will be given in the text and associated with the acronym *TYotF*.

[20] God's Gardeners' blue sack-like clothes are humorously countered by the blue coloration of the Crakers' bellies and genitals during the season of their mating.

matriarchy. Apparently, Glenn was not too keen on women's liberation theory![21]

Things are not so neat, however, since we often sense a sort of ambivalence in which pairs of opposites coexist: the God's Gardeners are unwilling to bother about aesthetic and 'frivolous' cares, thus challenging the consumeristic trend of society which continually advertises beauty treatments as the equivalents of immortality. The same is obviously true for the naked Crakers, who only act under the impulse of the procreative drive. Nevertheless, Glenn has somehow managed to make them stunningly beautiful, actually resembling fashion models.

Another clue to the complex interrelation between the two groups might be detected in their approach to the 'violet biolet' matters. From Ren's account we know that only light curtains protected the privacy of the God's Gardeners' rooms, and that was somewhat awkward when it came to the lavatory situation. They claimed that "digestion was holy and there was nothing funny or terrible about the smells and noises that were part of the end product of the nutritional process" (*TYotF*, p. 76), which does fit well with their insouciance regarding elegance and refinement. In *Oryx and Crake* Glenn explains to a puzzled Jimmy how he had to adapt the humanoids' digestive system, endowing them with a special organ (*caecum*), inspired by the Leporidae (hares and rabbits) in order to allow multiple reingestion of the same food (caecotrophs) and break down cellulose. Jimmy objects that it ultimately amounts to ingesting one's own faeces ("what it boiled down to was eating your own shit", *OaC*, p. 187). Glenn replies that it is functional to optimise nutrition and "any objections to the process were purely *aesthetic*" (*OaC*, p. 188, emphasis added), which reminds us of the God's Gardeners' pragmatic, carefree approach to digestion matters. Of course, we might detect here a sort of ironic retribution on Crake's part, since one of humanity's latest habits was a generalised cannibalism, with a further ominous nuance linked to the abusive male attitude towards women, as in Blanco's case. In light of these details, as well as from the long-term plan to restore an Edenic condition on earth – one fully integrated into the environment and unmediated by human technology – we might posit a sort of filiation between the two systems, where Glenn's would be the derived one, providing the *essentialised* translation of Adam's master plan. In simple words, as the God's Gardeners' choice of vegetarianism is deeply inbuilt in the Crakers' digestive apparatus, the same would be true for many of the latter's behaviours, mirroring the God's Gardeners' learned ones. In keeping with Bianca Del Villano's reasoning,[22] I would say that while Adam maintains a theoretical approach that goes deeper towards an inner core of truth, and which he defines in negative and immaterial terms, Glenn chooses to operate on a tangible, material plane, refusing to postulate what is not measurable or consistent with his scientific view. It seems to me that the two positions are mirror-like and inverted, the first one focusing on the invisible, and the second focusing on materiality, with their results having many common traits, as a detailed comparison can show. In both cases, God is seen to apply to an unattainable aspect of reality, and can be postulated (as a *no-thingness*) or denied, according to the disposition of the subject.

As hinted above, Crake's handling of the situation is somewhat authoritative, as reflected by many statements and drastic actions on his part. While explaining his Paradice

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[21] The Crakers' mating ritual borders on rape in the eyes of the non-Craker women (especially Amanda), for the Craker men will not take 'no' for an answer; of course, the whole procedure is aimed at procreation.

[22] B. DEL VILLANO, "An Ecocritical Retelling of the Bible: Genesis and Apocalypse in Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*", pp. 151-70.

project, he speaks of the genetic changes in a rather ambiguous manner when he advertises the features of the humanoid prototypes (also defined as "floor models", *OaC*, p. 355) as likely to please world leaders, for they are engineered to be docile, unaggressive and, of course, good-looking. These are actually much valued qualities in the dystopian society he is going to erase. His comment might be ironical, but the implication is that the "models" would be appreciated by a hypothetical, would-be world dictator. Given also their limited intellectual potential, we have an uncomfortable feeling about a double-edged strategy, which could evolve through unforeseen directions.

In the same unilateral manner, he resolves to excise the neuronal configurations responsible for religious, creative, and artistic trends, deliberately effecting a sort of genetic lobotomisation in the new race, up to his clamorous statement about eliminating the very idea of God: "the G-spot in the brain, *God is a cluster of neurons*" (*OaC*, p.186, emphasis in original). The Crakers are also not supposed to write or develop speculative thought, and the God's Gardeners proceed (once again) on a parallel plane, since they are prohibited from leaving any written records, giving the impression they were about to resume oral traditions.[23] Glenn did not manage to eradicate the ability to sing, in that the Crakers sing all the time, this being another feature in common with the God's Gardeners. Moreover, the vocal sounds emitted by them have a crystal-like, extra-human quality, resembling – one might hazard – the music from the spheres, and thus symbolising the very irreducible spiritual dimension denied by Crake. I think that their 'uncanny' singing is the audible sign of the impossibility of erasing the higher human functions, probably rooted in a sort of *otherness*. This might be the paradoxical dimension that Adam calls 'no-thingness', which would justify the recourse to the word 'uncanny',[24] leading us towards the cognitive model derived from quantum physics, as I am going to show.[25]

We might also object that Adam would encourage his followers to stay committed to devotional practices, whereas Glenn would try – as with the singing – to radically prevent his Crakers from doing that, without succeeding, as they develop some sort of ritual.[26] As noticed by Jimmy, they also show a tendency towards "conversing with the *invisible*" (*OaC*,

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[23] The transition from an oral culture to a written one, with reference to 5th-century classical Greece, is considered as a milestone for the developing of speculative thinking and the leaving behind of the mythological frame of mind. This was mainly because the written word favoured the objectification of the thinking process, linking it to an intellectual dimension rather than to a given speaker. See E.A. HAVELOCK, "La composizione orale del dramma greco", in C. MOLINARI (a cura di), *Il teatro greco nell'età di Pericle*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1994, pp. 92-93.

[24] When, in fiction, a deep and elusive level of being is increasingly approached and alluded to in various terms (oblivion, solitude, the heart of darkness, "the Open that is at the foundation of things", the unified field), some 'uncanny' manifestations might present themselves, as I have suggested in a close reading of *Heart of Darkness* and other texts, where phenomena of the return of the repressed are also involved. Then again, the French philosopher Lacoue-Labarthe connects the Conradian 'horror' – related to Kurtz's 'hollow core' – to the *rien d'étant*, the nothingness of being, a concept derived from Heidegger. See P. LACOUE-LABARTHE, "The Horror of the West", in N. LAWTOO (ed.), *Conrad's* Heart of Darkness *and Contemporary Thought: Revisiting the Horror with Lacoue-Labarthe*, London, Bloomsbury, 2012, pp. 116-17; A. ROCCHI, *L'incontro con la* wilderness. *Macrofiguralità e incroci intertestuali da Conrad a Malouf e Patchett*, Pisa, ETS, 2017, pp. 85-86, 147-48, 167-68. See also note 49.

[25] We might postulate that the human's neural cortex and nervous system are specialised in capturing this unsubstantial alterity, the impersonal intelligence diffused throughout creation.

[26] They do that spontaneously, but they are not the only ones among the hybrid new species: the pigoons (*the pig ones*) mourn their dead with some nascent burial ceremonies, and, as Toby fleetingly notes, the elephants – the old species, not an engineered one – did that too. Noticeably, barriers have always been porous.

p. 186) – a dimension that Crake was adamant about ignoring – and therefore an attitude of devotion.[27] Of course, Adam wants the God's Gardeners to be ecological, respectful of animals, averse to consumerism and commodification, with celebrations helping to strengthen their beliefs, while Crake's humanoids are already entrenched in the ecological line by virtue of their genetic constitution. Besides, one might have some reason to suspect Adam of adopting a strategy aimed at emotionally involving the simpler members of the sect in order to make them veer towards the desired course of action, whereas the Adams and the Eves – the ruling *élite* in the cult – know better than that. When Adam suggests that Toby accept the role of Eve Six, she hesitates and cautiously admits her basic lack of belief in what he is preaching. He appreciates her honesty and affirms that, in their form of 'religion', *action* precedes *faith*. So, what is required of her is only to act *as if* she believed. This amounts to admitting that his doctrine is, in a way, a *construct*, and that it requires trust, besides ironically alluding to Pascal's precept *Priez et vous croirez*, adding the hidden implication of *gambling* (as the precept resembles a *bet*) to the already precarious certitudes he is offering to her.[28]

Moreover, Adam says that all religions are only a shadow of God, human intellect allowing only a dim representation of the truth. This might signal his resorting to familiar tactics to obtain obedience (like "the reason is bigger than you are", "you don't need to comprehend the entire plan", and so on). But it also recalls what quantum physicists tell us: reality is not what it looks like – so that the dynamics of subatomic particles' behaviour are similar to the visions of saints, or to drug-induced ones. We have an example of this idea through Toby's eyes, when she ingests ritual drugs (at least twice) to induce the deeper understanding she needs at some crucial point. The first time she resorts to drugs, it is to be enlightened about whether or not to become Eve Six. She then sees a tomato plant glowing, with its fruits beating like hearts and the crickets producing strange sounds: "*quarkit, quarkit, ibbit ibbit, arkit arkit*" (*TYotF*, p. 204, emphasis added), which might be a discreet hint at the realm of subatomic particles. When firstly discovered, the quark was thought to be the most essential, primary constituent of matter, revealing the unstable reality of many others, which were said to be even more unsubstantial and unpredictable. The other two terms might refer to information technology for interactive communications and 'augmented reality', fleetingly suggesting that our so-called conventional reality might be holographic, with reference to the broadening of the spectrum obtained by our sensory receptors as the necessary condition to enter its most subtle, hidden aspects.[29]

The vision Toby gains is also meaningful and epiphanic for the reader, even if it seemed rather opaque to her at the time. Her tell-tale image was an animal with "gentle green eyes and canine teeth, and curly [golden] wool instead of fur" (*ibidem*), in which her mentors (Adam and Pilar) conveniently recognise a lion, choosing to see it as a positive sign of strength, in view of her new role. Actually, we are in a position to infer that the image corresponds to a "liobam", a genetic splice obtained from "lion" and "lamb", ordered by

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[27] The women perform a sort of invocation to Oryx, raised to the rank of a divine figure.

[28] Actually, as we are going to see, the idea of gambling also recurs in Crake's vision, as the name 'Para-dice', chosen for his project, ambiguously suggests.

[29] "Ibbit" and "arkit" might be decodified as referring to the Integrated Broadcast Broadband systems (Ibb) – employed to improve interactive communications – and to the various applications (Arkit) simulating interactive augmented reality and inducing an enhanced virtual reality. Besides, "bit" might stand for "binary digit", the smallest unit of stored computer information, carrying either value 0 or 1.

the Lion Isaiahists – another "fringe cult" (*TYotF*, p. 47) – to represent and also to induce, to "force" (*TYotF*, p. 112) the fulfilment of the prophecy about the two animals living in peace on earth. At the time of her vision, Toby has never seen a liobam in real life and she does not identify it.[30] But we do, and since she basically needed to clarify her religious doubts, we might suppose that the encoded answer was that theology is *indeed* a construct, made out of ideas and verbal precepts functional to some purpose, thus sharing the hybrid nature of splices and apt to guide individuals not fully able to cope with truth by their own means. In *MaddAddam*, Toby entertains the Crakers with stories that veil the realities they are not prepared to absorb, repeating thus the ancient practice of speaking and preaching in a language appropriate to the auditorium, as in fables and in certain holy books, and as Adam had done, too. So, since the liobam is doubly dangerous, because the ferocity of the beast is disguised by its gentle appearance, the visionary image might be understood as an implied assessment of the practice to *force* the advent of any utopian condition on earth, which is what is indeed attempted by Crake – a warning that, significantly, not even Adam had been able, or willing, to grasp. The liobam contains the figure of the oxymoron, which I think is pivotal in the trilogy and might lead us to a core meaning, a central *beeping spot*, capable of disclosing unexpected perspectives.

3. *The Leading Role of Rhetoric*

So, neither of the two leaders, Adam or Crake, is completely 'pure', as they retain a certain degree of affinity, in the form of shared mind-patterns, with the power groups they originate from. For instance, Adam One is skilled at using inducement strategies as was his father, the chief of a squalid sect called PetrOleum Church, which represents the apotheosis of corruption, as hinted at in the satirical touch associating the multinational oil industry with Petrus's church.

Speaking about his brother, Zeb says: "he was just like the Rev, really, *only inside out, like a sock*: neither one of them gave a shit about anyone else. It was always their way or zero".[31] He also describes their father as a criminal, a "cheerleader for souls" (*M*, p. 71) and their boss at the same time. The Rev created his own cult to "thank the Almighty for blessing the world with fumes and toxins" (*M*, p. 136), which is in a way analogous to what Adam did with the God's Gardeners, except that the Rev's 'religion' was aimed at lucrative, unethical goals, professedly in favour of pollution. The father told people what they wanted to hear, ran media outlets, befriended politicians and the Corps members: a kind of behaviour which annoyingly recalls his son's policies, only reversed, and directed towards criminal ends rather than ecological ideals. The Rev looked "pious as hell", another oxymoronic expression which ties in with images like "the flip sides off the same coin" (*ibidem*) and of the sock turned inside out, and also with the interlacing utopian/dystopian aspects, well represented by the complementarity of Adam and his father, amalgamating noble and ignoble, desirable and undesirable aspects. The Rev, besides creating a fake, corrupt religion, is also an abusive father, an uxoricide and a sexual pervert, whose

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[30] Due to the time-shifting narration, we know that she would see real liobams only after the great plague.
[31] M. ATWOOD, *MaddAddam*, London, Hachette Digital, Little, Brown Book Group, 2013, p. 407, emphasis added. All further references will be given in the text and associated with the acronym *M*.

degree of degeneracy matches that of the evil Painballers, who epitomise the quintessence of violence and oppression. The latter's already evil nature has exponentially increased through a sort of institutional survival training, created to give a chance to the most heinous criminals, as an alternative to capital punishment. It functions as a sort of extreme "knitting machine", in Conradian terms.[32] The men who succeed in escaping from the arena are mentally rewired, so that their higher cognitive and spiritual functions (in the unlikely case there were some left, at the start of the procedure) are definitively dwarfed. They are to act only through the reptilian, automatic brain area, which, when predominating, prevents empathy and generates addiction to aggressivity and the craving for power.

Indeed, we have here another puzzling chain of associations which might link the Painballers' gangland to the innocent Crakers, apart from the latter's extraneousness to aggressivity. Both groups are in fact re/programmed to function instinctively and without intellectual mediation: the Edenic humanoids, who are devoid of any knowledge of evil, and the representatives of the *ultra-fallen* old humanity. At the beginning of *MaddAddam*, the Crakers are indeed the ones who, in an untimely manner, free the two imprisoned Painballers – the torturers of women – in an unreflecting and unpremeditated way. In so doing, they bring about a new phase of chaos, which the alliance of Toby, Ren and Amanda had temporarily succeeded in keeping at bay by capturing the Painballers. This anomalous, limited convergence of the peaceful humanoids and the worst champions of fallen humanity, a distillation of evil, might be grounded in the region of brain's physiology that pertains to basic autonomic functions and survival capacities. At the end of *MaddAddam*, the explicit reference to the *medulla oblongata* – respectively, the names given to the human-Crakers hybrid twins, a female and a male, born to Swift Fox, a scientist and ex MaddAddamite[33] – calls to mind the neuronal ganglia located in the brain stem. As a consequence, the Crakers' unreflecting action might just *stem* from this ancient part of the nervous system, which, depending on occurrences, can ignite a vital drive or a deadly one (Painballers), that is, the urge to live or its opposite (the destruction of other forms of life or our own). Here, one might single out a physiological root for the Freudian theory relating to the pleasure principle and death drive. We can then see how meanings are refracted by endless mirroring effects, entangling characters and groups in a multi-faceted prismatic conceptual system that innovatively links linguistic constructions and fictional realities.

Having inherited the strategic abilities and persuasive talents of his father, Adam uses them for a noble cause, but we can see the shadow of the Rev in his iron hand in a velvet glove, and in the rhetorical skills he uses to convey his eco-eschatological message. In my opinion, he adopts a sort of double register that lets us guess the utilitarian nuances and pragmatic undercurrents in his doctrine. He establishes an oligarchic *élite* conforming to different standards, keeping computers as well as governing "as ruthlessly as medieval

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[32] In a letter to Cunninghame Graham (20 December 1897), Joseph Conrad referred to a perverse automatic process able to "knit us in and out" without any chance to undo it. Conrad evoked thus the socio-ideological complex of strategies aimed at maintaining a certain political order by training individuals to act in favour of imperialism. This process generates behavioural automatisms. While analysing the reasons for the carnage in Rwanda during the 1990s, François Warin spoke in terms of a "genocidal machine", apparently misquoting Conrad's expression. See F. WARIN, "Philippe's Lessons of Darkness", in N. LAWTOO (ed.), *Conrad's* Heart of Darkness *and Contemporary Thought: Revisiting the Horror with Lacoue-Labarthe*, p. 136.

[33] A group of scientists acting inside the sect, who eventually abandon Adam's cult to follow Zeb's leadership. Crake forced most of them to collaborate with him in the Paradice project; only Zeb escaped the coercion.

monks" (*TYotF*, p. 225), without being required to fully believe: in a word, they tend to be 'more equal' than others (in Orwell's famous formulation).

For his part, Crake, the scientific mind allied with and aligned – as an outsider – to the God's Gardeners, does not have any scruples in adopting intimidating methods while putting into action his plan for regenerating humanity. Such methods are actually analogous to those used by the CorpSeCorps, the private police at the service of the Compounds' *élite*. The MaddAddamites who tried to escape forced collaboration in his genetic project "fell off pleebland overpass" (*OaC*, p. 353). This expression, which alludes to the Madd-Addamites' elimination, also applies to Glenn's father's death, a crucial event the son will dedicate his life to revenging, as Shuli Barzilai[34] points out through a comparative analysis with Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Adam and Crake retain the ruthless, hierarchical traits of the dystopian regime which resurface even in the post-apocalyptic world, along with a new posthuman order. This is possibly signified by the thin smoke that, in the end, announces the departure of Zeb from the group of the survivors plus Crakers. The residual evil is smouldering and emits alarming signals.

In their developing mythology, the Crakers are told that their creator had wanted to eliminate the *chaos* from the world for their benefit. Apparently, the intended 'thorough cleansing' cannot be absolute, as in the ancient Indian civilisation, where the universal order was represented by the concept of *ṛita*, according to which even an ideal situation must contain a small amount of disorder, which is functional to the overall equilibrium, meaning that we cannot have absolute perfection without a trace of chaos. On the other hand, even if Glenn claims to be scientifically neutral, his alleged objectivity is filled with dialectical and rhetorical elements (as hinted above), detected by Jimmy in his friend's reasoning about the concept of im/mortality, which the scientist equates with the absence of the foreknowledge of death ("'Sounds like Applied Rhetoric 101,' said Jimmy. 'What?' 'Never mind Martha Graham [rhetoric school] stuff'", *OaC*, p. 356). Crake the scientist is apparently trying to become familiar with the rhetorical tools, a fact that links him to the top rhetorician, Adam – as in their assessment of the notion of God. However, since Adam is more skilled, Glenn, while tentatively moving a few steps into the other's domain, lays himself open to his influence or even manipulations, as we shall see.

Besides his aptitude for convincing and recruiting devotees, Adam displays an even darker side, which the reader can infer at some crucial junctures in the narrative. At one point, Adam needs to eliminate his father in order to continue on his way, but does not commit parricide himself. He creates the perfect situation to induce Zeb to execute him. His brother operates in the sect as Adam's secular arm, doing the dirty work that cannot be avoided; that is why his non-orthodox behaviour is tolerated in the sect. We know from Zeb's account to Toby that he was sent on duty to the Scales and Tails sex club. Through Pilar (a senior Eve coming from the Compounds' top scientific minds), Zeb had previously received a 'bishop' forwarded by Adam. That chess piece concealed three pills containing lethal bioforms, the prototypes of the Blisspluss pill that Crake would later spread all over the globe. Adam himself recommended Zeb keep those pills at hand at the Club, where the Rev would arrive in due course. As the 'bishop' is a religious chief (besides being a chess piece), the cryptic message metonymically means that the poison is intended for the Rev,

his so-called religious authority identifying him. Therefore, the vector ('bishop') of the pills implies that the poison would have to be put inside the displaced real objective, i.e., the Rev's body (literally, it should be ingested by him). This is a meaningful example of how Adam uses rhetoric to create powerful phrases or images, thus conveying his will to instigate adepts to perform the required actions.

Pilar, at the time, was also acting as a friend to the young Glenn, and while delivering the bishop to Zeb she informed him that it was with the same poison that Glenn's father had just been murdered and that, given his swiftness of mind, the boy would not take long to realise it and act accordingly. It might be no coincidence that Glenn himself avenged his father's death on the greatest imaginable scale, setting into motion a mass genocide and, at the same time, giving concrete form to Adam's prophecy about the end of humanity. Both Adam and Glenn were similarly motivated to avenge a parent who had been murdered with the participation or connivance of the other, but the one who first acted accordingly, and who contrived to provide the younger one with the inspiration and the tools to do so, was Adam.

After the noxious bioforms, contained in the secretive pills, had reduced the Rev to pink froth, the remaining ones were returned to Pilar, who would undertake to analyse them: why did she not proceed to do it in the first place? Why introducing this detour through Zeb and the Scales and Tails sex club if not to create the opportunity to eliminate the noxious parent? Afterwards, Pilar left the HealthWyzer Compound to join the God's Gardeners and be Eve Six for a while. After her death, the pills are sent to Glenn with a letter from his deceased friend: it was her last wish, and Adam is shown as *passively* approving. But we know how skilled he was at making others conform to his unspoken wishes. In this context we learn who Eve One was. Her name is Katrina WooWoo, a mysterious woman Adam was in love with, a dark Madonna-like figure who ran Scales and Tails, but who, at the time Zeb had first met her, danced on a trapeze with a python draped around her neck. In that previous period, she had also acted as a *Miss Direction* for a magician: that was what Slaight of Hand – an artist with whom Zeb worked, too – called the female assistants who helped him to *divert* the audience's attention at crucial moments. So, Adam had a passion for the elusive, lynx-eyed girl, the same Miss Direction his own brother had previously set eyes upon. This is a telling fictional detail highlighting Adam's inclination to act covertly, *misguiding* both his adversaries' and his converts' judgement through his active proselytism. Moreover, the peculiar association of this "scaly, feathery" (*M*, p. 211) kind of woman, endowed with great seductive power, with the idealistic and apparently naïve Adam might be connected here with his talent in the art of rhetoric, traditionally conceived to make sharp weapons out of words, also given his willingness to use it to entice and persuade people under the aegis of the legendary Sirens, a mythological foundation for that classical art. The effective word – trained to be an apt, double-edged instrument – might eventually convey a veritable sort of knowledge, while being ambiguous, engaging, and even misleading.[35] At the same time, a near connection with Slaight of Hand – possibly

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[35] Laura Pepe identifies in the myth of the Sirens, engaged in a singing contest against the Muses (their aunts), the imaginative pattern at the foundation of rhetoric, to which they would provide the captivating, persuading, and sly side, oriented to win at all costs, whereas the Muses – who prevail against them – represent the noble aspects of the arts. See L. PEPE, *La voce delle Sirene. I Greci e l'arte della persuasione*, Bari e Roma, Editori Laterza, 2020, Ebook, pp. 9-15. Besides, I would point out that the very idea of courtship, associated with Katrina – WooWoo, as Zeb calls her, her real name being Wu – and applied to an enticing usage of words, might also suggest intriguing conjectures about Atwood's views on the nature of storytelling.

another of Adam's facets – is established, placing Adam in yet another current of thought; the illusionist Slaight of Hand obliquely provides an apt metaphor for the great illusionism at work in the phenomenal world – the divine play originating reality, called Māyā in the ancient Indian civilisation and, in a later phase, acquiring the connotation of a mirage.[36] The love triangle might then be regarded as symmetrical to the one involving Oryx, Jimmy, and Crake – Oryx being loved by both – also given the latter's propensity for leading his friend astray in order to obtain his collaboration in the Paradice Project, and possibly even induce Jimmy to end Oryx's life and his own – as Jimmy would realise afterwards.

At this point we might conclude that a certain amount of fictional details points to a hidden circulation of ideas and crucial intelligence between the forces at work. Such details are either explicit, as Pilar's letter – even if its real content has to be intuited –, or exerting a less direct influence, as the encoded message sent to Zeb via the bishop. For instance, we know – through Ren's account in *The Year of the Flood* – that at one point she and Glenn had a fleeting amicable relation as teenagers, after she had returned with her mother to the privileged world of the Compounds. They enjoy discussing the God's Gardeners' ideas together; we have here a rather puzzled Glenn who tentatively enquires about the sect's representations of the Waterless Flood: did the God's Gardeners really believe that the deadly event would occur soon? The concept derives from God's promise in the Bible to never again resort to waterfloods in order to exterminate humanity, as a pact established with the survivors after the waters had retired from the face of the earth. But the oxymoronic expression is insistently used by the God's Gardeners at the pre-apocalyptic time to warn about the imminence of disaster. They are indeed preparing for that event, training themselves to survive in the bush, stockpiling hidden food and so on. The emphatic repetition of their chosen formula creates an emotional terrain in their listeners. And Glenn, being informed about his father's murder, is in a good position to pick it up. More so after receiving the same pills that had been cause for the crime[37] – provided by Pilar with Adam's consent. He is indeed the perfect recipient to fully acknowledging the implied message, and, like Zeb, he might also absolve the function of a 'vector' for the chain of action to be continued. But the initiator of the chain was Adam One.

So, besides the more or less overt moves to obtain Crake's participation in a large-scale project, I think there are effects rooted in the power of language structures and rhetorical figures at large, of which the oxymoron is probably the most powerful in this context. As we know, according to Freud, the contents of the unconscious are naturally represented by condensation and displacement. Jacques Lacan has traced this basic functioning back to the language area, pointing at figures of speech such as metaphor and metonymy, and aligning himself with the positions of linguistic structuralism. But sensory perceptions (auditory, tactile, and visual) also contribute to the formation of tropes, so that verbal language is not exclusively involved in the process of conveying meaning, as happens with the liobam in Toby's vision, where the trope consists of a wordless image.

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[36] M. ANGOT, *L'Inde classique*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 2001, p. 204.
[37] Glenn's father had discovered a criminal plan concerning the use of those bioforms (hidden into health supplements to be subsequently spread around) for lucrative aims and dissented from it. Margaret Atwood has stressed the fact that, in her "speculative fiction", she deals with potentialities inherent in our society, without inventing her plots from scratch, but rather representing "things that really could happen" (as Jules Verne did), given our technological resources; she gathers information and divines what outcomes might, in a near future, plausibly spring out. See M. ATWOOD, *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination*, p. 6.

In many psychological theories – such as Carl Gustav Jung's, Roberto Assagioli's, James Hillman's – the collective unconscious is inhabited by symbols and archetypal configurations, which are often substantiated by figural tropes. In the new quantum conception of the mind, promoted by neurosciences,[38] the unconscious is often assimilated to – even identified with – the quantum field level, seen as an immaterial platform to our world. Quantum physics makes us also realise that consciousness plays an important role in establishing material reality, and language, when seen as a tool capable of faithfully expressing human intention, powerfully helps to structure our world, notwithstanding the unbridgeable gap between the two spheres.[39] In Atwood's trilogy, one notices several ways in which language is used with a view to reshaping the world: from Adam's rhetorical approach – in his preaching and via the God's Gardeners' hymn book – to Amanda's visual works of art. Amanda rather aims at deconstructing single words and their respective linguistic channels, possibly choosing to destabilise them. Language is superimposed upon reality in accord with anthropocentric assumptions, thus governing nature-society relations. Amanda's living pieces are planned to serve as visual meditations about the implications of some basic words. For instance, she arranges dismembered parts of dead animals in the shape of words in order to photograph the scene of vultures tearing them apart. The picture might symbolise the latent conflict between human language and real-life referents, as pointed out by Valeria Mosca,[40] or the moment when human predominance is overturned to make room for other species. The picture figuratively counterbalances the rudimentary cosmogony of creation offered by Toby to the Crakers in *MaddAddam*, where Oryx – who turned into a natural deity for the Crakers' benefit – laid two owl eggs, one full of animals and one full of words, and the latter were all devoured by the humanoids, leaving the animals confined to dumbness, as in the previous cycle. On the contrary, in Amanda's picture, the words – made of animals' flesh and blood and representing language being construed at the expense of the plurality of animals – are devoured by predatory birds rather than humankind.

Amanda's artistic activity might be regarded as a third ecocritical position – the other two being Adam's and Glenn's – where the poles of semiosphere and biosphere are left free to interact without any patronising induction whatsoever, in order to find alternative linguistic channels and more respectful equilibriums, even at the price of a radical reconsideration of the human status, as dramatised in her living forms of art. It is also relevant that this third modality is put into play by the smart, self-sufficient pleeblander Amanda, the one woman in the novel to bring about a sort of theoretical (on the figurative plane), speculative attempt verging on a bio-eco-ethical vision; maybe she is a fictive authorial representation.

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[38] The joint efforts of Roger Penrose (a mathematical physicist) and Stuart Hameroff (an anaesthesiologist) have led to a quantum theory of consciousness seen as mediated in the human brain by tubulins (Orc-OR theory: orchestrated objective reduction), while Karl Pribram (a neuroscientist), through his holonomic model of brain, postulates that processes occur in a non-localised way and that memory is encoded in wave-interference patterns. The theory about the holographic nature of the universe originated from a collaboration with David Bohm.

[39] Quoting Jacques Derrida, Valeria Mosca claims that Atwood is quite aware of the self-referentiality of discourse and its superimposing upon reality, which is conceivable by humans only through verbal and textual constructs. See V. Mosca, "Crossing Human Boundaries: Apocalypse and Posthumanism in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*", *Altre Modernità. Rivista di studi letterari e culturali*, 9, 2013, p. 46 ff., https://riviste.unimi.it/index.php/AMonline/article/view/2985/3163 (last accessed on 31 December 2020).

[40] *Ibidem*, p. 48.

Even the great physicist David Bohm[41] reflects deeply on how our language affects the very perception of material reality. We know from quantum theory that the latter is a continuous flux (along with the mind) and is not just made up of separate, unrelated objects. Borrowing from older theories, he thinks that languages are structured to convey fragmented concepts, and our brain is consequently trained to perceive the world at this level, for practical and temporary purposes. He even speculates about an experimental verbal form which only uses verbs and derived lemmas, and which he calls 'rheomode', apt to favour a different perception of the inner and ever-transforming state of matter. This is based on the premise that it is necessary to go beyond an "atomistic attitude to words",[42] allegedly corresponding to an analogous, fragmented conception of reality. The idea is to use the rheomode to emphasise the process rather than the effect, cast as something permanent in the current frame of mind.

Atomism has been functional to represent reality, but, by splitting the atom up, it has been discovered that matter is mainly made out of void – enabling us to credit metaphysical concepts such as Adam's *no-thingness* with a scientific foundation – and sub-atomic particles can be imagined as waves of probabilities, rather than fixed realities and, as has been conjectured, it is the act of observation that makes them collapse into a more permanent state. This perspective has opened new horizons on how consciousness and intention might help to induce tangible effects. So, verbal or visual constructs, acting as catalysts, might affect the characters' awareness and, through their actions, ultimately influence material realities. This seems to happen in the trilogy, about which I hope I have given a few hints in the light of a new cognitive paradigm concerning mind-matter relations and affecting many domains besides physics.

4. *Conradian Echoes of the Core Reality*

According to mystics, on the one hand, and to quantum physicists and contemporary deep ecologists, on the other, there is an inner level of being where no ontological divide between animate and inanimate things is admitted, where the so-called barriers between natural kingdoms and species are obsolete. This range of ideas matches with what quantum physics tells us about subatomic levels, adjoining a non-localised and immaterial field into which bosons, photons, and quarks, the basic constituents of materiality, are plunging and resurfacing at unimaginable speeds. Here consciousness and matter are non-locally logged-in, outside space-time coordinates. At this level there exists an 'implicate' order, that is the enfolded structure, initiating a constantly flowing stream which externalises into the 'explicate', unfolded one, aka the tangible reality, so that, in Bohm's vision, all seemingly separated things are interconnected and part of an evolving whole.[43] The concept of a continuous flux goes back to Greek philosopher Democritus, also a great upholder of atoms

[41] D. BOHM, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, London and New York, Routledge, 1980, pp. 39-60.
[42] The atomistic vision – initially endorsed by Democritus – has been ground-breaking and fruitful for physics. However, quantum physics, closely following the full discovery of atomic structure at the beginning of the 20th century, has produced other and often paradoxical perspectives, capable of shedding new light on ancient spiritual and metaphysical predicaments.
[43] The constant flow that involves and connects all aspects of reality in an undivided unity has been called the "holomovement" by David Bohm, meaning that the undivided wholeness is always flowing and evolving.

(5th century B.C.), and to Nāgārjuna (ca. 2nd century A.D.), the most renowned philosopher of Eastern Buddhist tradition. Significantly, the latter used logic to promote the exploration of the subtler layers of being – where, of course, thought is doomed to extinction – which again is seen as a continual stream of interrelated events never to be fixed or isolated.[44]

In Toby's visions, we recognise glimpses of the deeper nature of reality, beginning as "a crinkling of the window glass that separates the visible world from whatever lies behind it" (*M*, p. 271), so that our usual frame of mind, and therefore our vision, reveals its provisional, segmented state. For Toby, the effects of Enhanced Meditation are, in fact, announced by a "wavering, a shift" (*ibidem*) of the usual scenario, the one commonly detected by our senses during waking hours. It is like a *Gestalt switch*, when a character's perspective shifts to other standpoints, in a process that allows insights into an undivided level permeated with a feeling of projection into a whole. In *Oryx and Crake,* the highly specialised and fragmented frame of mind, taken to extremes in technoscientific environments, is represented by Ramona, Jimmy's stepmother: "She wasn't stupid […] she just didn't want to put her neuron power into long sentences […] It was because they [his colleagues] were *numbers people*, not *word people*" (*OaC*, p. 28). This is more or less the basis of the great cultural divide between humanistic and scientific disciplines: a gap that might be bridged under the impulse springing from a holistic viewpoint. Basically, our civilisation favours the segmented style of envisioning the world, and this is reflected not only by the way our brain decodifies visual data, but also by the organisation of the entire corpus of knowledge. Conversely, in Toby's enhanced frame of mind, the overall interrelation emerges spontaneously; for instance, she notices the sow's ears and associates them with flowers: "Huge ears, calla lilies", while the piglets' eyes look like red-purple berries: "elderberries eyes" (*M*, p. 273). It is a sort of poetry-like proceeding, but we might also recognise in it a budding capacity to perceive the common matrix underlying natural phenomena.[45]

Forms are possibly encoded at this level – as in Plato's hyperuranian world – from which living creatures and inanimate things alike descend. Crake decides to intervene artificially upon this level by mixing up human genes with those of animals and plants, according to a crucial plan of action subjected to different evaluations. In the *The Year of the Flood*, Ren says that Glenn was called "cyborg" by the youngsters who had apparently perceived his natural vocation (*TYotF*, p. 271). We know there is a voice in the trilogy, epitomised by Jimmy's mother, who is strongly against this line of action. On the other hand, the 'cyborg trend' might be considered from an altogether different perspective. In this connection, Donna Haraway has envisaged in the cyborg's assembly

[44] Unlike the opposite categories of 'true' and 'false' in Western thought, the traditional Buddhist view also envisages the possibility of an overlapping between truth and falsity (in terms of neither true nor false, and both true and false): we have thus the *catuṣkoti*, "the four corners of truth". Nāgārjuna uses this tetralogy both positively and negatively. In order to better comprehend how it works, Aaron J. Cotnoir stresses the need to disambiguate between a conventional and an ultimate perspective, each of them characterised by its own notion of truth. I add that the distinction between conventional and ultimate reality might echo the Conradian one between 'surface truth' and 'inner truth', to which I shall refer. See A.J. COTNOIR, "Nāgārjuna's Logic", in K. TANAKA et al. (eds), *The Moon Points Back*, Oxford, OUP, 2015, pp. 184-87, and M. ANGOT, *L'Inde classique*, p. 268.

[45] Characters who have gone natural often present body modifications, physically mirroring aspects of the environment to which they are connected; in fact, the 'gone natural' state of mind entails the overcoming of barriers between entities commonly considered as separated (humanity, animals, and plants). See A. ROCCHI, *L'incontro con la* wilderness. *Macrofiguralità e incroci intertestuali da Conrad a Malouf e Patchett*.

of qualities and abilities a great symbol of transcending barriers and binomial systems.[46]

In fictional situations we might also find representations of an access to a sort of inner reality, and thus catch glimpses of a different way of relating to other beings and to the land, beyond the socially accepted frame of mind. For instance, a character immersed in a 'wild' context[47] might be threatened with loss of bearings and react differently than usual, depending on his/her personal ability to cope. The basic level is represented by cases of *going native*, possibly evolving into *going natural*, a metaphysically charged state, almost transcending traditional binary oppositions between man and the natural world, where the self becomes part of a continuum encompassing all beings, including inanimate things. When a character reaches that interrelational state, compatible with deep ecology theory, he/she tends to lose the illusion of separateness and, at the same time, there ensue phenomena such as an altered time perception, a sense of calm and silence, premonitions and the opening of multiple possibilities, the loss of single-mindedness and the insurgence of multiple focalisation.[48] Ultimately, access to the deepest level of the self may lead to the 'threshold of the invisible' (in Conrad's words), a place from which oxymoronic formations arise spontaneously (like the former one) and denote a paradoxical locus. All attempts to put the 'ineffable' into words are bound to resort to similar expressions, containing oppositional qualities.[49]

François Warin speaks of a "dark sun", another oxymoronic expression related to the source of being, with which native tribes usually succeed in coping. He claims that, unlike Westerners, they entertain better relations to "the Open that is at the foundation of things";[50] or, I would say, to a 'bottomless base' that can be fascinating or dizzying and is often spoken of as a void from which the repressed, both personal and collective, might come back with magnified and even genocidal violence, as with the notorious whispers echoing in Kurtz's hallucinating mind in *Heart of Darkness*.

My claim is that, in Atwood's trilogy, an inverse process is set in motion. In fact, the oxymoronic formula 'waterless flood' – which is repeated in a sort of mantra-like fashion

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[46] "A Cyborg Manifesto", by Donna Haraway, was first published in 1985 on *Socialist Review.* The blend of human and technological elements becomes here a figuration of a possible new stage of cultural evolution and integration of sexual, ethnical, and biological diversities, in which the 'cyber' element is shown to disrupt the traditional dichotomies and exclusions ingrained in the essentialist way of reasoning. See D.J. HARAWAY, *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century*, ProQuest Ebook Central, Minnesota U.P., (1985) 2016, and R. BRAIDOTTI, "La molteplicità: un'etica per la nostra epoca, oppure meglio cyborg che dea", in D.J. HARAWAY, *Manifesto Cyborg. Donne, tecnologie e biopolitiche del corpo*, trad. it. L. BORGHI, Milano, Feltrinelli, (1991) 2018, Ebook, pp. 4-34.

[47] The term 'wilderness' refers to fluid and indefinite entities with no fixed borders or centre, being connoted as pure spatiality. The realities epitomising it are mainly the sea, the desert, and the virgin forest: to these we can add human crowds, as Conrad himself noticed. See A. ROCCHI, *L'incontro con la* wilderness. *Macrofiguralità e incroci intertestuali da Conrad a Malouf e Patchett*, pp. 21-22.

[48] This process might at first be announced by sensations of freezing and petrification and by a sight impairment (through fog, blindness, and so forth). For a detailed illustration of such effects, see A. ROCCHI, *L'incontro con la* wilderness. *Macrofiguralità e incroci intertestuali da Conrad a Malouf e Patchett.*

[49] We might imagine that the deepest layer of being would open onto the entire universe like a sort of portal where personal and material existence would touch each other. This possibly recalls the "extime" in Jacques Lacan's terminology – a French neologism standing in opposition to the "intime" – which has also been used by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe to denote a borderline region of the self opening towards the outside. See P. LACOUE-LABARTHE, "The Horror of the West".

[50] F. WARIN, "Philippe's Lessons of Darkness", in N. LAWTOO (ed.), *Conrad's* Heart of Darkness *and Contemporary Thought: Revisiting the Horror with Lacoue-Labarthe*, p. 130.

by the God's Gardeners and is further canalised by Adam One's covert, indirect influence on predisposed subjects (like Glenn) – helps to trigger a reversal of the entropic state of society (its 'chaos'). It actually paves the way for a renewing plunge into a primordial state that nullifies civilisation while resetting its harrowing conditions. The God's Gardeners are so convinced that the event is bound to occur as to almost invoke it, in a sort of death drive acted out to accelerate the inevitable, as claimed by Toby herself.

After the genocide brought about by the Waterless Flood, the earth returns to a state of unbridled wilderness where the few survivors are threatened by disorientation and a loss of focused planning ability, like the castaways on desert islands one reads about in colonial and post-colonial novels. When suddenly immersed in a 'wild' setting, these characters generally display a richly nuanced range of reactions, from sheer befuddlement to the awareness of a universal unity, as we can also observe in the trilogy. In *Oryx and Crake* Jimmy is plunged into a desolate environment with no chronological coordinates, as vividly shown by his blank wristwatch ("zero hour", *OaC*, pp. 3, 433). After the collapse of human society, he believes he is the only survivor on a deserted planet, apart from the Crakers. Language is beginning to crumble, loosening its grip on reality, and leaving "blank spaces in his stub of a brain" (*OaC*, p. 4). He starts hearing whispers that affect his mind and recklessly intrude on his consciousness: "He hates these echoes. Saints used to hear them, crazed lice-infested hermits in their caves and deserts" (*OaC*, p. 11).[51] For Jimmy, signifiers are threatening to become like empty shells, losing connection with the signified objects. Words keep popping up autonomously in his mind. This "dissolution of meaning" is like a "drifting off into space" (*OaC*, p. 43). He almost expects to see demons or mermaids coming to lure him towards destruction. Jimmy counteracts this process by clinging on to his memories, looking for a logic to redeem a hopeless situation, and succeeding to a certain extent in giving shape to the "unrestful and noisy dream",[52] while providing a first account of the disaster. He even approaches the dimension of a kind of spiritually refined experience by appreciating the uniqueness of special moments: "It's a luscious, unreal green […] he feels a sudden, inexplicable surge of tenderness and joy. Unique […] There will never be another caterpillar just like this one […] another such moment of time, another such conjunction" (*OaC*, p. 46). Such "flashes of irrational happiness" (*ibidem*) suddenly irrupt into his awareness, unprepared as he is to consciously process the value attached to them.

Jimmy will eventually collapse owing to an infected foot injury, and remain in a lethargic state for a while, just as Marlow does in *Heart of Darkness*, after receiving the 'paw-stroke' inflicted by the wilderness, another Conradian expression denoting the price the unprepared must pay for being exposed to the great "solitude" or "oblivion".[53] The reference to imperial textuality is not inappropriate, the more so as Jimmy himself hints at some prescription relating to a daily routine aimed at "the maintenance of good morale and the preservation of sanity" (*OaC*, p. 4). In this connection, he quotes from "some obsolete, ponderous directive written in aid of European colonials" (*ibidem*). Again, the internalised book asserts the necessity "to avoid pointless repining, and to turn one's mental energies to

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[51] 'Echo' is a key word in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, recalling the wilderness whispering in Kurtz's experience.

[52] J. CONRAD, *Heart of Darkness*, in ID., *Youth, Heart of Darkness and The End of the Tether*, New York, Dutton, (1899) 1974, p. 93.

[53] Terms recurring in Conrad's text to denote the wilderness, or rather the impersonal level underlying it.

immediate realities and the tasks at hand" (*OaC*, p. 54). Like Marlow, Jimmy is beginning to project a malignant intention onto the bushes ("someone unseen, hidden behind the screen of leaves, watching him slyly", *ibidem*).

Even Zeb, in *MaddAddam*, undergoes a process of mind unravelling and eventually approaches the borderline area where being and not being merge. He has just escaped a Rev's murder attempt and is lost in a forsaken tundra, where he "could sense words rising from him, burning away in the sun. Soon he'd be wordless" (*M*, p. 99). We do not know whether he will be able to think "with no *glass pane* of language coming between him and not-him" (*ibidem*, emphasis added). He perceives the not-him "seeping into him […] sending its rootlets into his head like reverse hairs" (*ibidem*). He has the impression to soon become "one with moss" (*ibidem*), the impression to incorporate and be incorporated by otherness, by an 'outside' objectified by the overgrown vegetation. In this case, it seems that the linguistic grid might help to preserve individuality. Similarly, the God's Gardeners sometimes went through a so-called 'fallow state', a condition that could range from deep meditation to depression to coma, and they believed that, when into it, one is "sending invisible rootlets out into the universe" (*M*, p. 41). In other words, the person is thought to gather new energy by transcending his/her common psycho-physical limits.

As for Toby's enhanced state of consciousness, it contains the full spectrum of effects detected in characters gone native/natural. She perceives luminous radiations shooting out of things and creating gauzy halos around whatever she contemplates. She also hears amplified sounds resembling voices ("hums and clicks, tapping, whispered syllables", *M*, p. 272), which enhance the experience of a multifaceted frame of mind as opposed to the prevailing, single-minded one. There is an expansion in the region of the heart ("Her heart's becalmed", *M*, p. 273), and also the perception of time is similarly 'widened out' at the crucial moment of the mute dialogue with the pigoon sow. This leads to the perception of many measures of time duration, in an encompassing of incommensurable degrees: "Life, life, life, life. Full to bursting, this minute. Second. Millisecond, Millennium, Eon" (*ibidem*). Every sense is intensified, from sight to smell and touch: Zeb's hand in hers is like "rough velvet" (*M*, p. 277), a slight oxymoron pinpointing the sensory state she has reached, through which it becomes possible to embrace pairs of opposite qualities simultaneously becoming true, coexisting. Even if that level of perception is triggered by ingested substances, it does not mean that the result should necessarily be a total illusion: "Doors are opened with keys" (*ibidem*), she muses.

In the end, whatever the cause of that sensory experience – be it a spontaneous regression, or a chemically induced one – what ensues from it is a real connection with the "wavelengths of the Universe" (*M*, p. 278). Arguably, this perspective does not come from any easy 'New Age jargon', but from new theorisations in physics concerning subatomic particles and their 'incongruous' behaviour – such as the wave-particle duality, providing two seemingly different versions of reality – as seen from our limited binary perception, that is the *surface truth*. Going deeper, towards the *inner truth* (a Conradian echo again), might be like approaching the non-local field and its outward contradictions, or, to put it in another way, the 'creative void' that Adam One compares to God.

So, in my view, in *The Year of the Flood*, the repetition of the formula 'waterless flood' functions as an evocation of the very state from which normally (so to speak) oxymorons surge, as figures connected to the *coincidentia oppositorum*. At that level of being – which one could assess with reference to the quantum field, the quantum potential of David

Bohm, Jung's collective unconscious,[54] or Adam's notion of no-thingness – we might find pairs of opposing qualities fused together, as though interfacing and merged in a sort of 'primal soup' where binary functioning is not in order or, maybe, is not the only law of nature existing. From this angle, in the trilogy, we might also approach the paradoxical turning upside down of values after humanity's near-extinction, seen as a sort of metaphorical dive into a subatomic level, a plunge into the original undifferentiated broth and subsequent starting of a new cycle. For instance, in *Oryx and Crake*, Jimmy's mother rages against the practice of genetic splicing that mingles genes from different species, particularly the human neocortex tissue implanted in a pigoon's brain. She argues with her husband: "You're interfering with the building blocks of life. It's immoral. It's sacrilegious" (*OaC*, p. 64), condemning the lucrative practice of mingling genes from diverse species or even natural kingdoms. Later on, when Jimmy hears from Crake about "wolvogs", a new dangerous splice "bred to deceive" – since they are engineered to seem innocuous (as with the liobams) – he expresses himself in a way that sounds like his mother's: "he feels some line has been crossed, some boundary transgressed" (*OaC*, p. 241). Both mother and son apparently support the ecological position against the practice of genetic manipulation, which they condemn from a practical and an ethical perspective. Theirs is a warning cry against the violation of certain frontiers, interspecies barriers protecting human and animal features. It is also the challenge upheld by Jimmy's mother as the *Hammerhead*, her code-name when she joined the God's Gardeners as an eco-warrior, after her brave getaway from the golden cage of the gated community. That secret name reveals a streak of fanaticism in her character – possibly suggesting a fundamentalist stance – that sees her unable to mediate between her beliefs and her motherly love for Jimmy.[55]

At the same time, one notices that, after the pandemic has wiped out civilisation, the scale of values has somewhat changed. The new prevailing values of cooperation between species, interspecies justice, respect for diversity and equal relationships, have become viable only because of the very genetical alterations implemented in the previous era by scientists and, most of all, by Crake, who crossed so many frontiers while engineering his Crakers. Although he acts as the main violator of the "building blocks of life" – in Jimmy's mother's words – in the new situation we can somehow appreciate the liberating effects of his experiment, which, in spite of its obvious limitations, has favoured a process of interconnectedness among living forms. The perspective is here upturned, since what was initially condemned has afterwards changed into an opportunity to establish a society based on the acceptance of and respect for diversity. From a phylogenetic perspective – as also summed up in the ontogenetic development of the human foetus – the human race has never been completely pure and strictly separated from other creatures, sharing with them

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[54] Carl Gustav Jung's conception of the collective unconscious was strengthened – especially in connection with his notion of synchronicity – by his intellectual relations with the quantum physicist Wolfgang Pauli, one of his former patients.

[55] After her flight from the Compound, she led for a while an underground activity using a secret name which, oddly enough, recalls something that Jimmy wanted from her in his childhood, when he provoked her thus: "He wanted her to be brave, *to hammer away* at the wall he'd put against her, to keep on going" (*OaC*, p. 24, emphasis added). And that was what she would do in her secret, rebellious life. The hammer was indeed her chosen weapon: before leaving home, and in order to avoid being spied on, she smashed her husband's and her own computer by using a hammer.

many biological traits, and the already mentioned "building blocks of life" have always been fairly mixed up.[56]

In *MaddAddam*, the hybrid humanoids and the sentient pigoons are protagonists in creating a new interspecies-balanced society. In order to realise this, we should look at the other side of the coin, the flip side of reality, and accept the fact that truth is not given once and definitively, but that we must be open to the revelations brought about by the interfacing, flowing currents of meaning. As with Donna Haraway's thought, the transgression of binomial divides (human/animal, male/female, body/machine) mixes up qualities and properties, thus bringing about a metaphorical potential to dismantle the practice of submission and exploitation of the 'other' – be it in terms of sex, race, species – by the dominating subject. The recurrent oxymorons in the fictional text signal that the game changer has been touched and there is a chance to start another cycle. Such a coexistence of opposite qualities may have different outcomes, which are not likely to be foreseen at the 'zero hour', the time when man's chronological measure dies out, a sort of Big Crunch. But the eventual, hypothetical phase of implosion of the universe has been announced here on a human scale.

5. *A Plural Child Figure: The Children of Crake*

The Crakers provide the locus where the basic ethical perspective is going to be overturned, as suggested by the nature of the door, which is a one-way mirror, ushering in the area adapted for their rearing, in the dome Crake has called "Paradice".[57] The mirror is reminiscent of a reversal of qualities (as hinted above), an inverted world, and even of Michel Foucault's[58] theorisation of a heterotopia/utopia dialectic.[59] Roughly speaking, utopia is the ideal, non-existing place, whereas heterotopia is an enclosed, real place, made by man, connected to many others and also to different times (heterochronia). In the French philosopher's view, a mirror is to be considered as a crossroads, pertaining to both utopia and heterotopia, as it is regarded as a placeless place offering a virtual projection of a real body, while having at the same time a material constitution. The textual image signals here

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[56] The "human is constantly mixed up with the nonhuman […] [the human] is materially and historically permeable to other natures, other matters, other cultural agents" (S. IOVINO, R. MARCHESINI and E. ADORNI, "Past the Human: Narrative Ontologies and Ontological Stories. Editorial", *Relations: Beyond Anthropocentrism*, 4 [1], June 2016, pp. 7-9, https://www.ledonline.it/index.php/Relations/article/view/988/793 [last accessed on 31 December 2020]). The reversal of sense invites us to go beyond the culturally imposed boundaries to human nature, as posthumanism urges us to realise.

[57] I understand the word as referring to a sort of 'assisted evolution', since the pun it contains – 'para-dice' – might allude to what is being performed by Crake, i.e., going beyond (*para*) the casual (*dice-like*) process of natural evolution.

[58] M. FOUCAULT, "Des espaces autres", *Empan*, 2 (54), 2004, pp. 12-19.

[59] The optical phenomenon of reflection is also significant in Karen Barad's vision. A philosopher, theoretician of consciousness and theoretical physicist, Barad regards it as emblematic of a critical thinking based on reflexivity and pursuing objectivity via the mirroring of identical objects held at a distance. Instead, diffraction (another optical phenomenon) is meant to establish a different frame of mind, more apt to mark differences which would be explored from the viewpoint of an internal state, for both scientific and socio-cultural aims. In this new perspective, the outer and detached standpoint, also criticised by Donna Haraway, would be overridden. See K. BARAD, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Durham, Duke U.P., 2007.

that we are entering an enclosed space (heterotopia), the secret laboratory where utopian fantasies are enacted, given flesh and blood. The Crakers themselves maintain a sort of dual significance (as we have seen), being palatable to some dictatorship in the old dystopian style and, owing to their composite genome, embodying the champions of a new post-anthropocentric civilisation based on interspecies dialogue. Engineered to be the prototype of a simplified humanity, they betray, on many accounts, Crake's expectations, given their propensity to start their own culture with roles and leaders, a mythology, written texts and so on, as already pointed out by many scholars.

The ending is open, poised on the verge of many possible outcomes, even if the cooperative inclination between the human survivors (the MaddAddamites and former God's Gardeners), the new humanoids (Crakers) and sentient pigoons (human-pig hybrids, with human neocortex implanted) seems well on track. What I wish to highlight here is that the Crakers are acting out the role of the 'child figure' (at least in the central action of the text), both as a group and individually, through Blackbeard, a youngster who develops an emotional and reciprocated attachment to Toby. In many fictional situations dealing with wild settings and with the ensuing borderline states of consciousness – i.e., presenting the syndrome I have roughly sketched above – a child figure might appear and operate as a portal to alternative states of perception, allowing the adult characters to enter deeply into the natural wild sphere, and eventually learn how to transcend human idioms and dualisms. This is what Blackbeard does when he communicates telepathically with the pigoons, serving as an interpreter between the two groups, the humans and "the pig ones", helping them to make peace and also to fight as allies against the evil Painballers; in other words, to fill the otherwise fathomless divide between those species. As other fictional children, the young Craker speaks a language without words, a language of unity, in this case rendered as telepathy, a rather immaterial medium. In this connection, it is notable that, given this faculty, the humanoids would indeed be capable of functioning at a quantum level, for telepathy might be explained via the concept of 'entanglement': the ability to communicate in a non-local way, as subatomic particles do, and as also human brains are able to do, as has been proved.[60]

Unlike other literary instances of the child-figure, which tend to shy away from civilisation, in the end, the Crakers are going to install themselves in a culture of their own, growing into adulthood after having performed their mediatory role, letting us presume that a new form of society is on the way. As hybrid children (Crakers plus *Homo sapiens*) have started to be born, the next phase of civilisation should be comprehensive of contributions coming from the two human groups involved. The child-function, played by Blackbeard, is highlighted in the text by a curious detail that vaguely casts him in the mould of an archetypal configuration. During the expedition made up of human survivors and pigoons, aimed at vindicating the criminals' murderous actions and liberating Adam, who was in their hands, Toby provides the child with a pair of Hermes Trismegistus cross-trainers (relics from a not-too-distant era) to protect his feet from cutting shards on the road. The shoes were endowed with "appliquéd green wings […] and lights that flash with every step

[60] The "transferred potential" detected in the EEG of subjects whose partner in the experiment was stimulated with flashes, demonstrated the presence of a brain-to-brain nonlocal correlation, supporting the brain's quantum nature at the macrolevel. See J. GRINBERG-ZYLBERBAUM et al., "The Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen Paradox in the Brain: The Transferred Potential", *Physics Essays*, 7 (4), 1994, pp. 422-28.

he takes" (*M*, p. 423). The attributions of the Greek god, presiding over the communicative sphere, surely fit the fictional situation, giving the child the status of an interpreter, namely a messenger between the two groups against a mythological background. We might mention other branches of Hermes's domain, like the protection over travellers and roads, extending it to exchanges at large, in a way that is consistent with the role of the child-figure, who lays the groundwork for overcoming real or imaginary borders and helps to connect previously separated entities. Moreover, given his *caduceum*, the god also encompasses the notions of wisdom and immortality, the search for the latter being a recurrent motif in the trilogy, approached differently by various subjects. The detail signals that old symbols and traditions are not extinguished in the post-apocalyptic scene, with a corpus of memories still active that is going to inform whatever is about to develop. To the domain of consciousness we might at this point apply the quantum concept that what has been acquired is still maintained at an informative, encoded, collectively available state.[61] In keeping with Dunja Mohr's analysis,[62] we might say that speculative fiction is strategically posited, since it can trigger a stimulating *multilogue* born from the entanglement of many voices, independent of race and species, and even comprehending those of other beings or inanimate forms, as plants or the earth itself, as viewed from an ecocritical perspective. By representing ecological, transhuman, posthuman and multispecies instances, literature mirrors many socio-cultural themes and fictionally applies to them the framework of ideas that also relate to the new physics, dealing with an all-comprehending flow and a multi-layered state of reality, associated with a faceted sphere of thought and perspectives. Thus, storytelling can contribute to changing culture's reference paradigms by framing them in paradoxical and semi-real situations, whose seeds are already present in our reality, as Margaret Atwood points out. Both storytelling and literary studies have indeed the potential to trigger the *mise en scène* of new behavioural and thought schema, helping to change pre-set beliefs and cultural expectations, as in a fictional laboratory. This is how humanity projects itself ahead, exploring alternatives to the current situation and finding its way towards mental and spiritual evolution.

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[61] According to the new-physics corpus of theory, even when the universe is extinguished, another one could possibly be born already 'clued up', just because the information relating to the previous level would not be lost at the level of quantum potential.

[62] Dunja Mohr affirms that the exploration of other times and spaces envisaged by literature "offers an exercise in cognitive and emphatic flexibility at a distance" (D. MOHR, "'When Species Meet': Beyond Posthuman Boundaries and Interspeciesism – Social justice and Canadian Speculative Fiction", p. 43).

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Camilla Del Grazia

Genre Reinvention and Environmentalism in China Miéville's *Un Lun Dun* as Critical *Un*-Topia

Abstract: China Miéville's macrotext is strikingly marked (or even haunted) by a recurrent attempt to decode and reconceptualise the city through the lenses of science fiction and fantasy, thus paving the way for a deconstruction that simultaneously targets normative conceptions of genre and of the urban environment. His 'young-adult novel' *Un Lun Dun* (2007) is perhaps one of the best examples of this. Here, critical dystopia and portal-quest fantasy give rise to an alternative, heterotopic version of London, inextricably bound up with the 'real' city and at the same time totally distinct from it. In particular, by literalising the metaphor of dislocation, Miéville shows how some of the correctives to pollution found by modern metropolises are tied to issues of social hierarchy that actually hamper any long-term project regarding a more sustainable environment for the entire community. This paper aims therefore at identifying some of the strategies that underlie such a subversive reimagining. In particular, it looks into how the teleological trajectory of the portal-quest fantasy and its selection of static actants is problematised and upturned. Moreover, the creative use of figurative language in the novel is shown to establish a continuous parallel between London and UnLondon, while also questioning the primacy of the former over the latter. Finally, Miéville's knowing hybridisation of forms and stances is seen as leading to an '*un*-topia', a site of reinvention that opens the city up to new readings and interpretations.

Keywords: China Miéville. Portal-quest Fantasy. Critical Dystopia. Urban Environmentalism.

China Miéville's SF and fantasy production has long been characterised by a programmatic combination of formal experimentalism and political engagement, as well as an almost obsessive fascination with the urban environment. From *King Rat* (1998) and the Bas-Lag series to *The City & the City* (2009) and *Embassytown* (2011), Miéville has repeatedly played with genre conventions to defamiliarise the city, drawing on its apparent fragmentariness in order to achieve a simultaneously formal and thematic subversion. In *Un Lun Dun* (2007), this reimagining is achieved by integrating a utopian/dystopian universe within the structure of the 'portal-quest fantasy', a strategy the author uses to discuss environmental issues with his readers – in this case, a younger audience.

   In this article, I would like to illustrate how the alternative version of London depicted in *Un Lun Dun* does not conform to any clear demarcation between an 'ideal' city and a 'degenerate' counterpart: it is rather a land of possibilities, both positive and negative. I suggest that by avoiding to conform to either utopian or dystopian canons, but rather constructing a liminal space between the two, Miéville gives rise to a "thirdspace": a place both real and imagined, able to encompass "subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history".[1] The cre-

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[1] E. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journey to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Cambridge, Blackwell, 1996, pp. 56-57.

ation of this '*un*-topia' runs parallel to both the progressive deconstruction of the novel's broader formal framework and the portal-quest fantasy, with its related functions of plot and characters. My aim is therefore to showcase how generic reinvention and hybridisation are not confined to stylistic innovation, but can be seen to open up new paths for relevant socio-political stances.

The centrality of environmental and ecocritical stances in fantastic fiction has long been recognised, albeit primarily in connection with a specific form, i.e., the representation of 'thinned' lands in Tolkienian high fantasy and, on a larger scale, in portal-quest fantasy. In discussing this category, Farah Mendlesohn remarks that "the primary character in the portal fantasy is the land",[2] a space in danger of disappearing or being corrupted, to be navigated and possibly salvaged by an unexperienced protagonist and his trustworthy, expert guide.[3] Evidently, this form has many similarities with traditional utopia, as regards first of all the sequence of actions undertaken by the protagonist, the focalising character who generally voyages to an unknown land. There, he relies on the expertise of a local resident and gradually becomes acquainted with the defining rules of the new environment through a series of significant experiences. The traveller is then set to return to his place of origin, which is often a more 'realistic' depiction of the author's own world. By virtue of his adventure, the protagonist finally appears more competent and mature.[4]

However, two prominent elements, one formal and the other purely conventional, have long kept the two speculative strands separated in the theoretical debate. The first one has to do with the nature of the land itself: while portal fantasy is often animated by a pastoral undertone and largely features rural settings, traditional utopia mainly turns its focus upon the city and the social conventions it engenders. The second one is epitomised by Darko Suvin's position regarding the difference between science fiction and fantasy: his renowned definition casts science fiction as a "literature of cognitive estrangement",[5] in the sense of a participative rediscussion of the normative systems of consensus reality. In keeping with Lyman Tower Sargent's assessment, literary utopia (and dystopia) figure as sub-genres of SF,[6] and in particular as its sociopolitical iteration,[7] endowed with the potential to foster a critical reappraisal of the 'real' world. Fairy tale and fantasy, on the other hand, would be indifferent and even inimical to "the empirical world and its laws",[8] thus crucially embodying an escapist attempt that does not allow for parallels to be traced and for reality to be dialectically reconsidered. Suvin therefore initially considered fantasy unworthy of serious

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[2] F. MENDLESOHN, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, Middletown, Wesleyan U.P., 2008, p. 28.

[3] See also J. CLUTE and J. GRANT (eds), *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, London, Orbit, 1997; D. WYNNE JONES, *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland*, New York, Firebird, 2006.

[4] See G. CLAEYS (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, Cambridge, CUP, 2010; especially F. VIEIRA, "The Concept of Utopia", pp. 3-27, and P. PARRINDER, "Utopia and Romance", pp. 154-73.

[5] D. SUVIN, "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre", *College English*, 34 (3), 1972, p. 372.

[6] On the well-researched subject of the connection between SF and utopia/dystopia, see also P. PARRINDER (ed.), *Learning from Other Worlds: Estrangement, Cognition and the Politics of Science Fiction and Utopia*, Liverpool, Liverpool U.P., 2000; P. FITTING, "Utopia, Dystopia and Science Fiction", in G. CLAEYS (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, pp. 135-53; K. KUMAR, "The Ends of Utopia", *New Literary History*, 41 (3), 2010, pp. 549-69; T. MOYLAN, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*, ed. R. BACCOLINI, Bern, Peter Lang, 2014.

[7] D. SUVIN, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*, New Haven, Yale U.P., 1979, p. 61.

[8] ID., "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre", pp. 375-76.

intellectual consideration, and saw the blurring of boundaries between the two genres as a sort of capital sin, a "rampantly sociopathological"[9] misreading. Yet, as also pointed out by China Miéville, Suvin was later to partially reconsider his position, recognising the increasing prominence of the fantastic against the "ebbing of SF".[10] Such an acknowledgment, however, does not seem to be "predicated on any erosion of the proposed firewall between fantasy and SF", being rather an "unfortunate necessity" dictated by the "quantitative explosion of fantasy" with which the intellectually honest critic could not avoid engaging.[11]

While prominent scholars have maintained the same compartmentalised critical outlook, Miéville exposes it as "untenable"[12] and detrimental, stating that "the embedded condescension and even despite towards fantasy that this paradigm has bequeathed stands as perhaps the major obstruction to theoretical process in the field".[13] In his distinctive fashion, Miéville refuses to award pre-eminence to one form over the other, remarking that while neither mode is inherently subversive or "resistant to ideology",[14] the *potential* for the articulation of antinormative stances is actually common ground between the two. As he contends, "utopias (including dystopias) are, rather, specific articulations of *alterity*, and […] it is of that that SF/fantasy is the literature. In this model, the atom of SF's *and* fantasy's estrangement […] is their unreality function, of which utopia is but one – if highly important – form".[15]

Literary utopia and dystopia, in other words, could be 'escapist' or 'institutionalised' as any other form, and Miéville's work clearly shows that their capability for subversion and cognitive estrangement thrives when put to the test through deconstructive strategies. If the articulation of alterity brings with itself a reconfiguration of introjected socio-cultural patterns, formal hybridity continuously interrogates our models for representing and consequently enforcing such structures. In binding the two together, Miéville creates a new, proactive path towards meaning-making.

In *Un Lun Dun*, he juxtaposes a parodic approach to the canonical portal-quest with an urban framework, all the while exploring the liminal space between utopia and dystopia and giving voice to pressing environmental concerns. It is worth noticing that *Un Lun Dun* is marketed under the commercial label of 'young adult fiction' (whatever this might mean), and indeed clearly addresses a younger readership with respect to the vast majority of Miéville's production. All the same, this feature does not lessen the author's political engagement nor his formal experimentation; rather, it laces them with a playfulness that possibly enhances the reversal effects he looks for.

As correctly evidenced by Cassandra Bausman, if the immediate frame of reference for *Un Lun Dun* is the conventional structure of the portal-quest, Miéville proceeds to systematically challenge its most prominent aspects.[16] In fact, like many similar contemporary

[9] ID., *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*, p. 9.

[10] C. MIÉVILLE, "Afterword. Cognition as Ideology: A Dialectic of SF Theory", in M. BOULD and C. MIÉVILLE (eds), *Red Planets: Marxism and Science Fiction*, Middletown, Wesleyan U.P., 2009, p. 232.

[11] *Ibidem*.

[12] *Ibidem*.

[13] *Ibidem*.

[14] *Ibidem*, p. 242.

[15] *Ibidem*, p. 244.

[16] See C. BAUSMAN, "Convention Un-done: Un Lun Dun's Unchosen Heroine and Narrative (Re)Vision", *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, 25 (1), 2014, pp. 28-53.

narratives (be they closer to the genre of utopia or more akin to urban fantasy), the novel is set in an urban environment, partially recognisable as our own, and in a present moment that is "no more than twenty minutes"[17] projected into the future. The chronotope of portal fantasy would instead normally call for a pastoral setting and an indistinct, almost mythical time. Moreover, in *Un Lun Dun* the familiar metropolis – London – is subjected to an uncanny reduplication, given that on the other side of the portal lies UnLondon, a different and yet eerily similar 'abcity' coexisting with its 'actual' counterpart in a hierarchically oriented and osmotic relationship.

While apparently based on a straightforward reversal, the strategy employed by Miéville to push the boundaries of the form and interrogate the related genres of utopia and dystopia is multiplanar and nuanced. That is to say, it targets traditional modes of characterisation, the linear progression of the quest and the cardinal functioning rules of the portal itself. In addition, it reflects in a metaliterary perspective on the use and misuse of figurative language, in connection with the tenets of the genre as well as with the relations of power it purports to establish. This allows the author to project the ecological concerns that orient the narrative – i.e., the impact of pollution upon society and the sustainability of practices like recycling and reuse – into the same, stratified discursive system.

Structure and Characters: Subverting the Teleological Hero-Quest

Up to the first encounter with the main antagonist, Bausman argues, *Un Lun Dun* appears to follow the trajectory and tone typical of a portal-quest story.[18] Nevertheless, when analysed in detail, the first introductory chapters already disrupt the fixedness suggested at the formal level, in a way that prefigures the strategy employed on a larger scale in the course of the novel.

We are here introduced to a group of secondary-school students, whose main standouts are Zanna, the tall, blonde, sociable girl towards whom everyone almost involuntarily gravitates, and her funny and caring friend, Deeba. Strange signs have recently begun to manifest themselves when Zanna is around: animals bow to her, clouds assemble so as to reproduce the shape of her face, and graffiti spelling "Zanna forever" appear around the neighbourhood. As it happens, her exceptionality is also confirmed by negative events. For example, she is attacked by an oily cloud of fumes that causes one of her friends to be injured and is later spied upon by an animated umbrella. While the ambush by the Smog, which serves as the novel's main antagonist, is narrated with a sense of urgency and threat, the remainder of the prodigies is generally treated with subtle humour:

The sky was unnaturally flat, as if a huge gray sheet had been pegged out from horizon to horizon above them. The air was still. Very faint dark stains coiled and disappeared, and the road was unmarked again. "Today…" Deeba said. "It's not a normal day." Zanna shook her head. Birds arced, and a clutch of sparrows flew out of nowhere and circled Zanna's head in a twittering halo.[19]

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[17] T. MOYLAN, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*, Boulder, Westview Press, 2000, p. 106.

[18] C. BAUSMAN, "Convention Un-done: Un Lun Dun's Unchosen Heroine and Narrative (Re)Vision", pp. 31-33.

[19] C. MIÉVILLE, *Un Lun Dun*, New York, Del Rey, 2007, pp. 11-12. All further references are to this edition and will appear parenthetically in the text.

Juxtaposing the ominous darkness that quite literally creeps at the corner of the character's eyes with the inflated quaintness of the "twittering halo", the author stages a contrast that reveals the staleness of heroic tropes, especially in connection with female figures. Defying hierarchy, the narrator is not the sole voice entitled to this kind of deconstruction: the solemn tone that would be expected from the apparition of signs revealing Zanna as the 'Chosen One' is also often undermined by Deeba, whose unfaltering witticisms and rationality sharply contrast with the tone required of this type of fantasy:

Some days later Deeba had been with Zanna, walking under the old bridge over Iverson Road. There behind the pigeon net, far higher than anyone could have reached, was painted in vivid yellow: ZANNA FOR EVER! "Cor. Someone else called Zanna," Deeba said. "Or you've got long arms. Or someone massive loves you, Zan." "Shut up," Zanna said. "It's true though," Deeba said. "No one else's called Zanna, you're always saying. Now you've made your mark." (p. 8)

It is perhaps improper to bring Ursula Le Guin's call for a stylistic differentiation between fantasy and other kinds of literature[20] into the present discussion (and perhaps the terms she sets are too constrictive for contemporary forms). Nonetheless, Mendlesohn is adamant when affirming that, to be effective, portal-quest must rely on a monologic point of view. This perspective can be voiced by different characters, but should be unequivocal and shared: history must be fixed and received, possibly passed on via reputable documents (such as diaries, letters, books, scrolls, or prophecies), and a sense of inevitability is to pervade the adventure.[21] On the other hand, irony, even at its gentlest, always entails a certain amount of plurivocity: it points to new possibilities for interpretation, "creating new levels of meaning".[22]

Though the incursions of the supernatural are not fully comprehended by the rest of the group (with the notable exception of Deeba), Zanna's extraordinariness is readily recognised by her friends, who manifest ambivalent feelings towards her, instinctively alternating between awe and fear: her heroic stature sets her apart in a way that her companions register, but fail to bring to consciousness. This is in part due to the 'phlegm effect': the inhabitants of London tend to close off against UnLondon in all its manifestations, so that it becomes impossible to focus on any incident, individual or object which has to do with it. The device is not uncommon in fantasy fiction, although it is not always so strictly formalised: Miéville even introduces a specific time frame (nine days) after which people travelling to UnLondon are forgotten in London. Interestingly, while Zanna's friends seem all to fall victim to the phlegm effect, Deeba appears to be immune to it. Furthermore, she is the only character whose emotional intelligence allows her to identify and name the sense of separateness elicited by the heroine. This metanarrative reflection upon the traditional role and representation of the hero(ine) brings to light usually unspoken considerations that are part of the horizon of expectations envisaged by portal-quest stories, thus adding to the subterranean undermining of the form already enacted through irony.

Intriguingly, one should also pay attention to the fact that the most notable infraction of genre conventions is hinted at almost immediately in the text, since "although individuals might cross both ways", as Mendlesohn postulates, "the fantastic does not. Such an effect

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[20] See U. LE GUIN, "From Elfland to Poughkeepsie", in D. SANDNER (ed.), *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader*, Westport, Praeger, 2004, pp. 144-55.

[21] See F. MENDLESOHN, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, especially Chapter 1, "The Portal-Quest Fantasy".

[22] L. HUTCHEON, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*, New York, Methuen, 1985, p. 30.

would move the fantasy into the category of *intrusion*, which […] uses a very different grammar and tone".[23] No matter how subjective, our appraisal of reality is uniform enough to exclude the possibility of intelligent umbrellas and animated pollution. Be that as it may, their supernatural provenance is ascertained by Zanna: followed by Deeba, she retraces the oily tracks left by her spy, and ends up into an unassuming basement cluttered with debris. There, she feels compelled to turn a rusty wheel lodged into a pillar of piping, thus opening a portal to UnLondon, a heterotopic[24] mirror version of London which enjoys a peculiar relationship with the 'real' city:

"Abcities have existed at least as long as the cities," it said. "Each dreams the other. There are ways to get between the two, and a few people do, though very few know the truth. This is where the most energetic of London's discards come, and in exchange London takes a few of our ideas." (p. 99)

It is clear that something supernatural (or, better, *un*-natural) travelled from the abcity to London, and then back again through the same threshold crossed by Zanna and Deeba, and that this permeability is a natural state for the two. We could perhaps conclude that *Un Lun Dun* is to be categorised as 'intrusion fantasy', were it not for the fact that Miéville quite deliberately makes use of the portal-quest structure and its teleological progression. Moreover, this configuration would not fit the criteria relating to intrusion fantasy, either, because the intrusion itself is not limited in time or space (the signs appearing to Zanna are numerous and scattered all around London). And, again, Miéville's narration does not always and uniformly elicit the wonder it should, so that, in Mendlesohn's view, this kind of irony would be best suited to a third category, i.e., liminal fantasy.[25] However, such a taxonomical undoing does not seem to compromise the efficacy of the narrative: rather, by pushing the boundaries of generic norms, it encourages the reader to tackle a certain amount of 'insubordination' towards preconceived notions.

The metanarrative game only picks up as the adventure progresses: after a series of curious encounters with helper figures, Zanna and Deeba meet the Propheseers, a group of guardians of UnLondon's stability protecting a sentient book of prophecies. Half encyclopaedia and half bearer of mystical knowledge, this book contains details about how the Smog came to be and found its way to UnLondon. Starting from the Industrial Revolution, the book explains, the fumes and chemical agents produced in London coalesced into a mass; what Londoners do not know is that over time the smog developed a conscience, becoming greedy for more sustenance and burning everything it could in order to expand.

It is worth noticing that the Frankensteinian mutation did *not* happen in the heterotopic UnLondon: not only does the magic cross both ways, then, but while UnLondon seems to be more attuned to it, the supernatural is evidently also native to London. While foreshadowing the extensive use of metaphoric literalisation in the novel, the paragraph also sets the tone for Miéville's ecocritical reflection. Hence the question concerning when one possibly starts acknowledging that a phenomenon has grown out of control, to the extent that its development becomes potentially unpredictable.

Contributing to the subversion is the book's description of the Great Smog of 1952, a historical report that turns into the reminiscence of an almost legendary battle for the pos-

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[23] F. MENDLESOHN, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, p. 2.
[24] See M. FOUCAULT, "Of Other Spaces", Engl. trans. J. MISKOWIEC, *Diacritics*, 16 (1), 1986, pp. 22-27.
[25] F. MENDLESOHN, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, especially Chapter 2, "Intrusion Fantasy".

session of the city, a battle that citizens did not realise was underway: "for five days, half a century ago, it assaulted London. It killed *four thousand people.* Its worst single attack. And still, most of you didn't even know you were at war!" (p. 101). After this event, London rallied against its enemy; yet, the book remarks, its subject is UnLondon rather than London, and the plan devised by the city to win the final battle is hazy, at best. Indeed, the book's report becomes closer and closer to a tale, recounting how Londoners first beat the Smog with the aid of a group of "weatherwitches":

"The Armets. It's an old word for helmet, and they were like London's *armor*, you see? And we've heard how they won. They had a magic weapon." "The *Klinneract*," announced Lectern. […] "So with magic and a secret war, Londoners drove the Smog away, but they didn't manage to kill it. It got away." "By coming here," the book said. (p. 101)

The fact that the book contains only a portion of the information that normally accompanies portal-quest plots and is vague about a relevant part of it – how the enemy was defeated by Londoners – decisively undermines its reliability. Nonetheless, it remains quite smug about being always right, foretelling that Zanna, as the "Shwazzy" (the heroine that the abcity is waiting for), is destined to prevail in her first encounter with her enemy, then to embark on a journey to recover a series of precious objects, each one crucial to obtain the next, and finally to wield the most powerful of them (the UnGun) to defeat the Smog once and for all.

When the Smog reaches Zanna and the first battle ensues, however, things refuse to follow the preordained path: Zanna is immediately defeated, and she and Deeba are sent back to the portal, leaving UnLondoners to their own devices as to the handling of the Smog problem. This anticlimactic end to the Shwazzy's adventure markedly contrasts with the traditional ending of the portal-quest under two respects: here, there is no eucatastrophe,[26] no resolution of the conflict and repristination of the existing order; more interestingly, the character whose perspective frames the journey back home is Deeba, the 'helper' figure. Atypically, the narrator reveals *her* thoughts and we follow *her* return to everyday life, while Zanna obstinately refuses to remember:

For a while, Deeba tried not to think about UnLondon, because it made her miss it. She soon realized, however, that she couldn't stop herself. In the streets, she would eye passersby and wonder if they knew of the abcity's existence. […] Deeba wanted to know about the UnLondoners, and UnLondon, and the Smog, and the secret war. That war with the Smog, in particular, fascinated her. The idea that something like that had once gone on in her own city made all the impossibility she had seen feel closer to home. *There must be UnLondoners who've moved to London, as well as the other way round,* she realized. (p. 151)

The time spent in UnLondon has effectively defamiliarised the city in Deeba's eyes, so much so that her movement through it is closer to the purposeful investigation of a modern *flâneur* than to the aimless strolling of an apathetic urbanite.[27] The metaliterary analysis

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[26] See J.R.R. TOLKIEN, "On Fairy-Stories", in ID., *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, ed. C. TOLKIEN, Hammersmith, Harper Collins, 1997, pp. 109-61.

[27] See M. DE CERTEAU, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Engl. trans. S. RENDALL, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, University of California Press, 1988; W. BENJAMIN, "Il *flâneur*", in ID., *I "passages" di Parigi*, a cura di E. GIANNI, Torino, Einaudi, 2000, pp. 465-509; N. PLESSKE, *The Intelligible Metropolis: Urban Mentality in Contemporary London Novels*, Bielefeld, Transcript Verlag, 2014, pp. 350-52.

she is entrusted with systematically points out all the infractions of the portal-quest fanta-
sies canon in one smooth paragraph, concurrently arousing the reader's curiosity as to the
impenetrable legend. Keeping in mind that Deeba roughly embodies the target age-group
for this novel, her step-by-step considerations work at a double level. Semantically, they
convey a reappraisal of the city meant to promote a similar critical thinking without falling
into didacticism. Formally, they introduce an antinormative attitude towards the conven-
tions of a given genre in an audience that is, in all probability, still in the process of appre-
hending those very norms. If, as Mendlesohn states, "[t]he genre accrues formalisms, and
authors negotiate with these forms", and "one aspect of this negotiation is experimenting
with which positions and rhetorics best familiarize (or defamiliarize) the reader with the
fantastic",[28] Miéville's strategy brilliantly uncovers a series of discursive elements to new
generations of readers.

Deeba's next moves, and especially the thought process that informs them, are similarly
revolutionary: in contrast with Zanna, Deeba feels no grand call to fulfil a preordained
destiny, nor any inexplicable force urging her to become the champion of the UnLondon
cause. Her decision to return to the abcity comes after much ponderation, and the dynam-
ics of this second journey is nowhere as straightforward as that of the first. Driven by her
curiosity and her need to believe UnLondon safe, Deeba investigates the legendary Armets
and the Klinneract through the most magical instrument at her disposal, a browser, and is
shocked by what she finds out. The first is not a group of powerful witches (at least, not
overtly), but the British RMetS, the Royal Meteorological Society, while the Klinneract is
nothing but the 1956 Clean Air Act. This unequivocally unmasks Benjamin Unstible – a
London scientist and the most influential man in the abcity – as a villain and fraudster:
though knowing the truth, he has inexplicably endorsed the 'magical' version of the events.

Despite having conclusive proof right in front of her, Deeba is filled with self-doubt,
wondering "[m]aybe it's me getting it wrong […]. Maybe […] I got the wrong idea" (p.
154). A teenager, a girl and a sidekick, Deeba voices her insecurities from a subordinate
position, in a way that undoubtedly resonates with a vast portion of *Un Lun Dun* readers:

They'll be fine, Deeba told herself. She told herself that again and again. *UnLondon'll get through.*
[…] *Maybe I'm the one with the wrong idea. Maybe everything's fine. Anyway, the Propheseers'll see
to it, one way or the other.* Whenever she thought that, though, Deeba could not help remembering
all the confusion about the Shwazzy and the prophecies […]. *Still,* she thought, *they'll have learnt
their lesson.* […] UnLondon would have to look after itself. She wasn't the Shwazzy. She was just
someone. How could just someone be any help, whatever was going on? (p. 158)

Questioning her role in the narrative in conjunction with her own capabilities, Deeba hu-
manises and flashes out the conventionally flat hero of the portal-quest, "more often an ac-
tant than an actor, provided with attributes rather than character precisely to compensate
for the static nature of his role".[29] It is indeed her empathetic character that pushes her
to reach out, and her ingeniousness that allows her to reconstruct, from bits and pieces, a
different – and much more arduous – way to enter UnLondon.

Once there, her resolve is tested again: her intention had been to warn the Prophese-
ers and leave the struggle to them, but it becomes immediately clear that the scholars are

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[28] F. MENDLESOHN, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, p. 17.
[29] *Ibidem*, p. 7.

not receptive to her warnings. On the contrary, they stubbornly refuse to acknowledge the truth, as if unwilling to recognise their own role in the gradual surrender of the abcity to the Smog. Quite innovative for this kind of fantasy is also the multi-layered characterisation of the council-like group, where the Propheseers are neither wise but temporarily ousted, as Gandalf, nor corrupted by the evil power, like Saruman. They are, much more realistically, complacent: too enveloped in their own system of beliefs and established truths to maintain a critical outlook on what surrounds them.

At the same time, there is a political group of UnLondon citizens, hypocritically called the "Concern", who actively work with the Smog for their own financial gain, and these people are singled out by free-thinking citizens as a dangerous force. The Propheseers, on the other hand, are not questioned until the consequences of their inaction stares them in the face, insulated as they are by their intellectualism and supposed trustworthiness.

The concept is not easy to grasp (even for 'competent' adults), and Miéville drives it home through the figure of Mortar, the head Propheseer. As the Smog has taken possession of the body of his dear friend, the scientist Unstible, Mortar keeps working with it, unwittingly buttressing its machinations and ignoring the literal cloud of fumes that thickens around him. Ultimately, his parable concludes with other people shouldering the responsibility of his mistakes. In this sense, parallels with younger generations having to bear the burden of an impaired environment that they have inherited from wilfully blind elders are almost too easy to draw. Still, the insertion of these passive characters in a mode of writing that traditionally draws a clear-cut distinction between 'good' and 'bad' illustrates how shades of grey can be just as dangerous as pure, intentional evil. On yet another level, this undermines the mystique of the 'wise figure' in portal-quest stories.

Deeba's subsequent route is more in line with the staples of the genre: she is aided by a local guide, the half-ghost Hemi, and traverses different portions of the unknown land, thus acquiring new knowledge and skills and forging meaningful relationships along the way, creating what is for all purposes a 'company'. Nonetheless, built into her progression is a strong reconsideration of the role of the heroine, together with her trajectory and the element that epitomises these *topoi*, namely the prophesy book. According to Mendlesohn, the 'found document' revealing the past and foreseeing the future functions as a surrogate for the narrative itself, and must therefore be masterfully concocted for the tale to hold:

We can no longer debate history, in the sense of interpretation, analysis, discovery; we can only relate the past. This scholasticism permits only macronarratives: the past in these books is always what has been recorded about the greats, and it has always been recorded *somewhere*. Yet concomitant with this is a reverence for *the* book […] perseverance is defined in part by the ability to stay on the straight and narrow path, to follow the words of prophecy and the delivered interpretation – in effect, for the hero to maintain his own position-as-reader.[30]

In *Un Lun Dun*, instead, the book is literally embodied, becoming an opinionated and at times demonstrably fallible character. As a matter of fact, it offers an interpretable version of the past and proposes a line of action for Zanna that turns out to be a dead end, thus indicating that the future is open to reinvention. Once existing in a canonical space, the book takes some time to mourn the loss of a fixed frame of reference and to truly accept that not all that is written must be passively received. For instance, it attempts to impose

[30] *Ibidem*, pp. 14-15.

a normative quest structure to the process of recovery of the magic weapon, calling for a "standard Chosen One deal" (p. 249) made of seven interrelated tasks. After completing the first of them, with much effort and at the cost of the lives of some good friends, Deeba is led to rebel against this notion:

"We'll skip the rest of the stuff. Save us some time. We'll go straight to the last stage of the quest. Let's go get the UnGun. Then we can deal with the Smog, and I can go home." […] "Look," said the book frantically. "You can't pick and choose bits from a prophecy. That's not how they work." "Let's be honest," Deeba said. "We all know you have no idea how prophecies work." […] "In fact […] it looks a lot like prophecies *don't* work. […] We are *not* walking through each of your chapters, book!" (pp. 302-304)

Deeba's rebellion against linearity quite overtly contravenes theoretical reasonings such as Mendlesohn's, according to which portal-quest fantasies should firmly adhere to an established set of rules. In addition, the character's rebellion challenges the basic premise that fantasy as a genre may not engage in overt metaliterary practices which would spoil the suspension-of-disbelief effect.[31] Steadily staging little revolutions that add to one another, *Un Lun Dun* therefore constructs the abcity in such a way that subversion and explicit commentary become embedded in the narrative itself. Rather than breaking the enchantment or undermining our enjoyment of the quest, this strategy seems to aim at liberating us from preconceptions: if we may no longer savour the emotional payoff of having our anticipations confirmed, we soon realise that surprises are still in store for us.

Furthermore, some of Deeba's expressions – "we'll skip the rest of the stuff" and "we are not walking through each of your chapters, book!" – quite evidently refer to unsanctioned readerly practices. While a parallel between the main character and the reader can undoubtedly be traced, here it is not the heroine that must attune to the passive 'position-as-reader', as happens with portal-quest stories, but the audience that should virtually be 'infected' by Deeba's antinormative, rebellious attitude. If prophecies and, by extension, plotlines no longer seem to work, neither does their definition of the characters' role and scope.

The "straight and narrow path" that Mendlesohn invokes is no longer there to guide our interpretation. Deeba's understanding of her original role in the quest, and the book's reaction to it, are in this sense exemplary:

There it was, in the index. "Shwazzy, Sidekicks of the." Below that were subsubheadings, each with a single page reference. "Clever One," she read. "Funny One." "Look…" the book said. "It's just terminology. Sometimes these old prophecies are written in, you know, unfortunate ways…" […] "So… I'm the funny one? I'm the *funny sidekick*?" "But, but, but," the book said, flustered. "What about Digby? What about Ron and Robin? There's no shame in –" Deeba dropped the book and walked away. It yelped as it hit the pavement. […] "Deeba." It was the book. Hemi carried it closer. "I want to apologize. I didn't write me. I've no idea who did. But we already know he or she was a moron." Deeba refused to smile. "They didn't know what they were on about. […] Even if my idiot authors didn't know it, *I* know you're not a sidekick –" "No one is!" Deeba shouted. "That's no way to talk about anyone! To say they're just hangers-on to someone more *important.*" "I know," said the book. "You're right." (p. 248)

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[31] See on this point B. ATTEBERY, *Strategies of Fantasy*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana U.P., 1992.

In keeping with the general design of the novel, metanarrative reconsiderations are realised through empathy: the sentient book must come to terms with the shortcomings of tradition and negotiate a fresh, less hierarchical perspective. Its attempt to deflect responsibility on the staples of the canon and on an established, well-loved lineage of "funny sidekicks" rings empty, and fails to convince Deeba, the reader, and ultimately the book itself. Convention is thus revealed to be a self-serving artifice which is generally adopted because it is *easy*: codified *topoi* are readily constructed and identified, and do not ask much of either the author or the audience. For his part, Miéville's can instead be shown to explore the possibility to forge intelligent and well-rounded characters within 'genre literature' and its related media.

Nor is it Deeba's inherent specialness that is seen to make her stand out from the company of UnLondon rescuers; later, when other characters attempt to elect her as the new Shwazzy, she resolutely refuses, stating "I'm *not* the Shwazzy. I'm completely unchosen" (p. 353). Significantly, "Unchosen One" is the title that she ultimately claims for herself. The pun naturally works because of its ambivalence: Deeba decides to embark on this mission of her own volition; in the process, she also becomes somewhat of an UnLondoner, and an aid for the abcity. However, she is not the sole, universally acclaimed hero(ine) in the war against the Smog: while she is undoubtedly the protagonist of the novel and the focaliser of the quest, Miéville is quite careful not to turn her into a world-historical individual within the context of the adventure. The complexity he strives for through a masterful modulation of tone, plot and character-construction is perfectly summed up in the paragraph describing the aftermath of the final battle:

It was only one full day after that extraordinary battle, but UnLondon was adjusting to the news and ways of postwar life impressively quickly. All over the abcity, stories of heroism and betrayal and incompetence and luck were emerging. There were plenty of champions Deeba had never heard of, who'd done amazing things, in parts of UnLondon she'd never been. (pp. 457-58)

There is no clean resolution to a war that took over an entire city, nor can a single girl or group of heroes/heroines save it simply by their own means. The act of saving comes from the cumulative efforts of multiple individuals, and "betrayal, incompetence and luck" are equally relevant factors to the outcome of a war. Introducing the notion of a "postwar" at this stage also goes against expectations with regard to portal-quest schemata, as it takes away from the finality of the Smog's defeat and leaves the door open to new developments. Similarly, Deeba's return to London should conclude her adventure in the otherworld and close its doors to her forever, while instead her crossing of the threshold becomes another (possibly fatal) blow to the rigidity of the form:

"[I]t isn't easy to cross between the worlds. Every time [...] the membrane between two whole *universes* is strained. Think what that means. [...] We'll miss you if you go, Deeba. But you have to choose." [...] "The stuff that happened here," Deeba said, "I'll never forget. What we did. I'll never forget *you.* Any of you. [...] And part of the reason I won't forget you," she said, "is 'cause I'll be back all the time." [...] "Come *on,*" she said, smiling. "What you even *talking* about, Mortar? It's *easy* to get from London to here. [...] People are *always* going between, and you don't see either universe collapsing, do you? You just think it's hard to go between the two 'cause you've always thought it must be. You're just saying that 'cause you sort of think you should." Deeba's friends stared at her, and at each other. "She has a point," Mortar said eventually. (pp. 460-61)

The two universes are not distorted by coexistence: intercommunication does not necessarily make the supernatural plane less 'magical', or the 'real' one less relevant. By extension, the hybridisation of modes and genres and the reinvention of their rules by contamination do not take away from the significance of the work. Through her customary wit and humour, Deeba wedges the portal between worlds open, effectively pointing to the elephant in the room: it had always been there, and convention only had kept its users from crossing over.

Figurative Language and the Creation of London's Un-*topia*

The subversion of the portal-quest structure is also connected with Miéville's characterisation of the 'otherworld', which innovatively takes advantage of a paramount feature within the rhetoric of fantasy fiction, namely the literalisation of metaphor, so as to carve out an interstitial space between ecological utopia and dystopia. It is also worth noticing that, together with the deconstruction of the quest structure and of fixed character roles, the extensive and creative use of figurative language manages to link ideological and formal stances. This is a strategy that Miéville consistently employs, as underlined by M.P. Williams:

To the mediated and genre-varying extent that China Miéville's fictions as a whole can be said to have an 'essential' core, I believe we might suggest that it is something akin to the following: the place of the socially constructed individual within social collectives, or, more abstractly, about multiplicity within singularity – and vice versa (of both). Or, perhaps we could say they are 'really about' how the fantastic can help us to understand how the above (and their reversals) work *in reality*.[32]

Building on Miéville's extensive reimagining of the city of London, Williams goes on to describe "Un-Londons" as "urban fantasy fictions which posit hidden places *under* or *unseen by* the real London […] which create a fantastic London located interstitially beneath or between the existing London. Un-Londons are para-cities in the sense of both parallel and, occasionally, para*site*".[33] He then distinguishes them from "Ab-Londons", which are "instances of London becoming estranged by means of something apocalyptic or transformative, and moving *away* from the familiar London and towards something definitively more estranging".[34]

However, while Williams places UnLondon firmly within the category of urban fantasy fictions, I believe that the continuous exchange of people, items and magic between the real and the imagined city – with the consequent rethinking of London as a whole – ultimately blurs the distinction between the two. Moreover, Miéville firmly refuses to elect either city as a privileged model, pointing to the dangers and possibilities expressed by both. In the upshot, I believe that the term '*un*-topia' could better encompass the author's open engagement with the utopian/dystopian model as well as his original dialogical model for the reconfiguration of the urban space.

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[32] M.P. WILLIAMS, "The Un-, Ab- and Alter-Londons of China Miéville: Imaginary Spaces for Concrete Subjects", in N. HUBBLE and P. TEW (eds), *London in Contemporary British Fiction: The City Beyond the City*, London, Bloomsbury, 2016, p. 177.

[33] *Ibidem*, p. 179.

[34] *Ibidem*.

The macroscopic and most recognisable metaphoric literalisation that we encounter is represented by the abcity itself. UnLondon is a hypostatisation of the repressed, a place where "the most energetic discards of London" traverse (p. 99), be they objects or people: it is *un*canny in the full sense of the word, familiar and profoundly disquieting at the same time. Recognition is often triggered only to be immediately undermined via an estranging process: nothing can be taken for granted in a place that gives the everyday, the over-looked, and the 'secondary' a chance to find a new *raison d'être*.

Zanna and Deeba's first impression of UnLondon is decidedly dystopian: the basement door that they go through leads them to what appears to be a maze-like landfill, illuminated by a strange, dimmer sun with a hole at its centre. Furthermore, the girls are immediately attacked by a pack of aggressive rubbish. The episode seems to position UnLondon as hierarchically inferior to London, a place where what is unwanted, thrown away and for-gotten in the city ends up and is abandoned. Indeed, on paper, UnLondon does not sound particularly appealing: while "energetic", the objects that come through the "Odd" (the buffer space between universes) are called "Moil":

Mildly Obsolete In London. Throw something away and you declare it obsolete. You've seen an old computer, or a broken radio or whatever, left on the streets? It's there for a few days, and then it's just gone. […] Sometimes rubbish collectors have taken it, but often as not it ends up here, where people find other uses for it. It seeps into UnLondon. You might see residue: maybe a dried-up puddle on a wall. That's where moil dripped through. And here, it sprouts like mushrooms on the streets. (p. 57)

And yet, the new uses that are found for these objects are strikingly inventive. For instance, while walking through a market, the girls notice colourful flower bouquets that, on closer inspection, turn out to be made of tools – screwdrivers, hammers and levers, all arranged in a neat bunch. Things that had a concrete material function in London become an aestheti-cally pleasing ornament in the abcity. Conversely, Obaday Fing, a tailor, fashions clothes out of book pages: "Never again need you face the misery of unreadable clothes. Now you can pick your favorite works of fiction or nonfiction for your sleeves. […] Learn while you dress!" (p. 35). These breaks with our preconceived notions of purpose-oriented and functionally-devised objects already indicate that the girls' first apprehension of UnLon-don might be wrong: the abcity finds beauty in usefulness, and usefulness in beauty.

Fing's work is particularly noteworthy, because UnLondoners tend to dress in old-fashioned uniforms. Those who think themselves well versed in the rules of *Un Lun Dun*'s otherworld by now would probably surmise that this is because uniforms rapidly fall out of use in London. But Miéville sweeps the rug from under our feet, since the nature of the communication between the two cities proves neither monodirectional, nor hierarchical, as Conductor Jones (a former Londoner) explains:

"The UnLondon-I," Jones said. "It's what gave them the idea for that big wheel in London […] Ideas seep both ways, you know. Like clothes – Londoners copy so many UnLondon fashions, and for some reason they always seem to make them uniforms. And the I? Well, if an abnaut didn't actually come here and see it, then some dream of it floated from here into their heads. But what's the point making it a damn fool thing for spinning people round and round? The UnLondon-I has a purpose." He pointed. What had looked at first like compartments were scoops, pushed around by the river. The UnLondon-I was a waterwheel. "The dynamos attached to that keep a lot of things going," Jones said. Above the wheel was the ring of sunshine. The two circles echoed each other. "Some people say," Jones said, "that the bit missing from the middle of the UnSun was what became the sun of

London. That what lights your days got plucked out of what lights ours." Zanna held out her thumb. The hole in the UnSun's center *was* about the same size as the sun from their usual life. "Every morning it rises in a different place," Jones said. (p. 64)

If there is no pre-ordinate directionality in the exchange of items between the city and the abcity, there is a clear distinction in the functions assigned to them. From this perspective, London seems at the very least to lack the inventiveness of UnLondon in finding value in things and in catering to its inhabitants, rather than to an unsustainable economic system. Sometimes, London's stance is decidedly predatory: the ideas it inherits from UnLondon are emptied of their usefulness, and even the Sun seems to have been forcefully torn from the abcity's skies. All in all, the spirit animating the two cities fundamentally diverges, or better, it rests on a radical opposition: while the one thrives in chaotic imagination, the other imposes a dehumanising uniformity, as suggested by the way it transforms UnLondon's clothes into uniforms.

This liberating possibility is showcased by Deeba's second entrance into the abcity, one she pulls through by following to the letter the indications provided by the book: "[e]nter by booksteps […] [a]nd storyladders" (p. 163). Armed with an emergency backpack, Deeba proceeds to climb the shelves of the local library, ascending higher and higher, always looking straight ahead. Progressively, the names of the volumes she comes across become less and less familiar, as in *The Wasp in the Wig*, *A Courageous Egg*, *A London Guide for Blazing Worlders*, and *A Bowl of Shadows*. These may of course sound outlandish, but most of them hide a more or less overt nod to other works: noticeably, "The Wasp in a Wig" was originally conceived as a chapter of Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* (1871); suppressed, the proofs resurfaced in 1974 at a Sotheby's auction. Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World* (1666) is a satirical utopia, sometimes considered one of the first examples of science fiction. *A Bowl of Shadows* could perhaps refer to a verse by Polish author Zbigniew Herbert, while *A Courageous Egg* is a fictional book featured in Miéville's own *The Scar* (2002). The metaphor literalised here is of course that reading grants access to a different world; at the same time, Miéville takes the opportunity to recognise the works that influenced him and helped shape the genre, like steps through which we ascend in literature. Naturally, the hypostatisation is relevant to the story, since Deeba does reach UnLondon through her own effort, and in the abcity things are at the same time both what they claim to be and something else, too.

Under this respect, UnLondon is decidedly closer to the conception of utopia as a medium that attempts to "restore wholeness to the fragmented social spacetime".[35] Its inhabitants, for instance, are a motley array of human and non-human types that live side by side without this being an issue, or even considered as a strange predicament. All seem to come to UnLondon to find self-actualisation. Jones, for instance, feels like he had become "mildly obsolete in London", while in the abcity he might fulfil his potential:

[T]hey decided they could save money if they got rid of half of us. Of course it messed things up. But them who made the decision were people who never took buses, so they didn't care. "We knew what we did was important. Look in the dictionary. 'Conduct: verb. To lead, control, or guide.' Some of

[35] E. GOMEL, *Narrative Space and Time: Representing Impossible Topologies in Literature*, New York, Routledge, 2014, p. 20. See also M.D. GORDIN, H. TILLEY and G. PRAKASH (eds), *Utopia/Dystopia: Conditions of Historical Possibility*, Princeton, Princeton U.P., 2010.

us weren't prepared to stop being guides. We look after travelers. It's…" Conductor Jones looked down, suddenly shy. "Some people say it's a sacred duty." "UnLondon… Well, sometimes, it can be a dangerous place. We had to be really ready to conduct […]. The drivers who came down swore to get the passengers from where they are to where they want to go. And to protect them." (pp. 57-58)

When citing the dictionary entry for 'conductor', Jones remarks that he identifies with all of these shades of interpretation, simultaneously: UnLondon lets him be – *needs* him to be – as semantically complex as the name for its role suggests. Other members of the company are possibly even more brilliantly characterised: the explorer Yorick Cavea is a man up to the shoulders, but has (of course) no head; his intelligent self is actually a little bird, whose cage is placed above the body's neck. Skool, which appears as a big man in an antiquated diving suit, is literally a school of fish: "They spent years refitting the suit, trudged all the way out of the sea to come and live with us" (pp. 397-98), explains Obaday, who in turn carries his tools on himself, having pins instead of hair. This decidedly anti-anthropocentric perspective resonates with the underlying issue expressed by the novel, that is to say, the ecocritical denouncement of unsustainable practices especially in the urban environment. Figurative language and metaliterary intertextuality both contribute to this blurring of clear demarcations between self and other, natural and unnatural, human and non-human, underscoring how artificial the difference sometimes is.[36]

Inherent in diversity and polysemy, however, is also the risk of misinterpretation and of partial readings, so that the notion becomes a double-edged sword questioning the stability of the utopian project. This ambiguity is signalled early in the narrative, and throughout the adventure, by a creative use of language which always underscores the inventive re-functionalisation and the antinormative, cooperative stance that animate UnLondon. By going through the portal, key expressions of the prophecy undergo a semiotic metamorphosis: the term 'Shwazzy', for instance, is a play on the French *choisi*, 'chosen one'. Likewise, the Armets and the Klinneract are transliterations and contractions of English words. Moreover, these terms are basically unmoored: they never quite correspond to the 'real' object they are supposed to designate, thus suggesting a semantic slipperiness that defies interpretation. The 'UnLondonisation' of such relevant terms renders them more suited to their changed environment and cloaks them in magic; however, the misunderstanding also renders the prophecy itself null.

The most evident instance of this can be found in the episode of the "Talklands", a separate realm within UnLondon ruled by the tyrannical Mr Speaker, who has the power of speaking words into existence:

"QUIET!" Mr. Speaker shouted, and Deeba gasped to see something living slip from his mouth, scuttle like a millipede down his shirt, and disappear. "NO TALKING WITHOUT PERMISSION!" With each word, another strange animal-thing seemed to coalesce and drop from behind his teeth. They were small, and each a completely different shape. They flew or crawled or slithered into the room, where, Deeba realized, hundreds of other creatures waited. Again, none had mouths. "SOOOOO," Mr. Speaker said slowly, watching her, a snail-thing popping out from between his lips. "YOU'RE JEALOUS OF MY UTTERLINGS?" Five more animals emerged. One, when he said *jealous,* was a beautiful iridescent bat. (p. 263)

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[36] See M.H. JACOBSEN and K. TESTER (eds), *Utopia: Social Theory and the Future*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2016; especially K. RIGBY, "Utopianism, Dystopianism and Ecological Thought", pp. 141-60.

Mr Speaker's court is entirely formed of such mouthless creatures, which have to obey him in everything and, being mouthless, literally have no voice; within his dominion, moreover, nobody is allowed to talk without permission, so that the Talklands are effectively an echo chamber for their ruler. The whole setting and the "utterlings" in particular offer a sharp commentary on referentiality and on the hegemony over language: their appearance seems to iconically represent their meaning and, coherently, it is also dependent on context and intonation. One word differently pronounced generates utterlings that are similarly shaped but different in colour and number of limbs; presumably, polysemic words spoken in different contexts would give rise to different utterlings altogether. Just like words, not all utterlings are equally effective: when Deeba tries to negotiate with Mr Speaker to leave the Talklands, he demands that she utter new words, and she chooses 'bling', 'lairy', 'diss', and 'brer'. In comparison with other utterlings, those embodying slang words are "particularly healthy and energetic" (p. 266), signalling that, despite being stigmatised as non-standard, demotic language is actually livelier. This egalitarian revolt against linguistic and political monocracy is then further expanded:

"I CAN DO WHATEVER I WANT," Mr. Speaker said. "[…] I'M MR. SPEAKER! WORDS MEAN WHATEVER I WANT. WORDS DO WHAT I TELL THEM!" […] Deeba looked around at the utterlings holding her, felt the strength of their grip. She thought quickly. "I don't think that's true," she said. Silence settled, and all the eyes in the room turned to Deeba. […] "Words don't always mean what we want them to," she said. "None of us. Not even you […] Like… if someone shouts 'Hey you!' at someone in the street, but someone else turns around. The words misbehaved. They didn't call the person they were meant to. […] Or even […] like some words that mean something but they've got like a feeling of something else, so if you say them, you might be saying something you don't mean to. Like if I say someone's really *nice* then I might mean it, but it sounds a little bit like they're boring. You know?" […] "The thing is," Deeba said, eyeing Mr. Speaker, "you could only make words do what you want if it was just you deciding what they mean. But it isn't. It's everyone else, too. Which means you might *want* to give them orders, but you aren't in total control. No one is." […] "So, you might think all these words have to obey you. But they don't." (pp. 267-68)

In her incendiary speech, Deeba ponders on illocutionary force, misfires and pragmatics in general in a way that is accessible to a non-specialist readership. This effectively causes a revolt against the tyrant, where the utterlings rebel against Mr Speaker and, by extension, the authoritarian and oppressive misuse of language. Despite being apparently self-conclusive, this episode is inseparable from the rest of the narrative: first, because three utterlings – Cauldron, Diss and Bling – join the quest and become full-fledged members of the company. Secondly, because this experience teaches Deeba a valuable lesson which she later applies in defeating other villains: her critical questioning of power is rooted in the understanding that people, events and even cities are never reducible to one readily apprehensible facet. While both utopia and dystopia frequently showcase such cooperative political reconfigurations, it is clear that the metalinguistic component of fantasy fiction is integral to *Un Lun Dun*.[37]

Genre hybridity and its conductivity to critical estrangement also frame UnLondon's subordinate relationship with London and the related issue of the Smog, which is allowed to exist and to flourish by virtue of a shrewd pact sealed with London politicians. This

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[37] For an interesting new perspective on the connections between utopia and rhetoric, see M. PORTOLANO, "The Rhetorical Function of Utopia: An Exploration of the Concept of Utopia in Rhetorical Theory", *Utopian Studies*, 23 (1), 2012, pp. 113-41.

naturally excludes a fully utopian reading of the abcity, inviting all the while a dystopian in-terpretation of London. Unbeknown to all but a few self-serving parties, the Environment minister herself has the city's pollution funnelled over to UnLondon, myopically believing to be in control of the agreement. The not-so-thinly veiled metaphor is multi-layered. First, it comments on our society's short-sightedness in dealing with environmental issues, which are here literally swept under the rug. Secondly, and of course relatedly, it highlights the hypocritical attitude of Western people taking advantage of the resources and workforce of LMI countries and using them as dumping grounds, while censoring their involvement in global pollution. Finally, it more broadly underscores the unsustainability of the economic system that leaves room for these disparities: namely, exploitative Western capitalism. This might seem a far-fetched extrapolation, but Miéville himself has thrown light on such an interpretative key in his essay "The Limits of Utopia", published on the platform *Climate & Capitalism*, where he argued:

The utopia of togetherness is a lie. Environmental justice means acknowledging that there is no whole earth, no "we," without a "them." That we are not all in this together. Which means fighting the fact that fines for toxic spills in predominantly white areas are five times what they are in minority ones. It means not only providing livings for people who survive by sifting through rejectamenta in toxic dumps but squaring up against the imperialism of garbage that put them there, against trash neolib-eralism by which poor countries compete to become repositories of filth.[38]

Considering its target audience, *Un Lun Dun* could hardly have addressed these issues in the same forceful tones. Nonetheless, I would argue that the metaliterary playfulness that orients the novel provides Miéville with a different but no less sharp tool to advocate for a revaluation of what utopia means to us and how it can easily turn into dystopia for others. The abcity hangs in the balance between the two, and liberating possibilities come with the warning that anyone can take advantage of them, even manipulating them to their ends.

It is worth mentioning at this point that Margaret Atwood, too, has recently coined a new word, 'ustopias', to refer to liminal forms containing the marks of both utopia and dys-topia, "the imagined perfect society and its opposite", each comprising "a latent version of the other":[39] "scratch the surface a little, and – or so I think – you see something […] like a yin and yang pattern; within each utopia, a concealed dystopia; within each dystopia, a hid-den utopia, if only in the form of the world as it existed before the bad guys took over".[40]

Yet, I am not convinced that this notion could aptly describe *Un Lun Dun*, specifically because of the latter's programmatic hybridisation of utopia/dystopia and fantasy fiction. In Miéville's text, the narrated world is not removed in time or space, but coexists with the 'real' city, only situated on a different plane. A more viable frame of reference for this kind of experiment seems to be that of 'critical dystopia',[41] a form that questions the genre

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[38] C. MIÉVILLE, "The Limits of Utopia" (2018), https://climateandcapitalism.com/2018/03/02/china-mieville-the-limits-of-utopia/ (last accessed on 31 July 2020). See also K. STANLEY ROBINSON, "Remarks on Utopia in the Age of Climate Change", *Utopian Studies*, 27 (1), 2016, pp. 1-15.

[39] M. ATWOOD, "Dire Cartographies: The Roads to Ustopia", in EAD., *In Other Worlds: Science Fiction and the Human Imagination*, London, Virago, 2011, p. 66.

[40] *Ibidem*, p. 85.

[41] See T. MOYLAN, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*, p. xv. See also L.T. SARGENT, "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited", *Utopian Studies*, 5 (1), 1994, pp. 1-37, and P. SEYFERTH, "A Glimpse of Hope at the End of the Dystopian Century: The Utopian Dimension of Critical Dystopias", *ILCEA*, 30, 2018, http://journals.openedition.org/ilcea/4454 (last accessed on 31 July 2020).

from within its boundaries and with a constructive intent. Indeed, the open ending of *Un Lun Dun*, as opposed to the portal-quest one, is well suited to critical dystopia, seen as "a textual mutation that self-reflexively takes on the present system and offers not only astute critiques of the order of things but also explorations of the oppositional spaces and possibilities from which the next round of political activism can derive imaginative sustenance and inspiration".[42]

Clearly inscribed into Thomas Moylan's examination of critical dystopias is also the issue of the relativity of the interpretation of a work as either dystopian or utopian, because political and cultural biases are bound to lead to variously oriented readings. Considerations of genre hybridity further enter the discussion when looking at Raffaella Baccolini's proposition that dystopian fiction's recent strategy of drawing recognisable tropes from other forms increases "rather than diminish its creative potential for critical expression".[43] Moylan, however, envisions a precise structure for critical dystopias:

[S]tepping inside the ambient zone of anti-utopian pessimism with new textual tricks, they expose the horror of the present moment. Yet in the midst of their pessimistic forays, they refuse to allow the utopian tendency to be overshadowed by its anti-utopian nemesis. They therefore adopt a militant stance that is informed and empowered by a utopian horizon that appears in the text – or at least shimmers just beyond its pages.[44]

Miéville's dialogue with fantasy fiction leads him to juxtapose two imperfect twin versions of London and to have them stare into each other's eyes in a way that does not clearly foreground where utopia and dystopia respectively reside. The stylistic and linguistic disruption of portal-quest fantasy, furthermore, allows Miéville to enact a didactic strategy that has readers follow Deeba's progress and imbibe her discoveries as their own; these discoveries are not treated as revelations, but rather as tools to conceive a discursive approach capable of interpreting reality.

It is my contention that the programmatic hybridity brought into being through the mutual contamination of utopia/dystopia and quest fantasy gives rise to an innovative experiment that might be described as '*un*-topia'. UnLondon is an elusive reality that resists panoptic perception, because here new details reveal themselves at every glance and shapes continuously shift. Even the Propheseers are to change their name and become 'Suggesters', thus indicating that fixedness of meaning is unattainable – and ultimately undesirable. Existing between utopia and dystopia, the prismatic multiplicity of the abcity holds an immense potential for deconstruction.

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[42] T. MOYLAN, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*, p. 189.
[43] *Ibidem*.
[44] *Ibidem*, p. 196.

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LINDA FIASCONI

Walking through Post-Apartheid Wastelands:
A Postcolonial Ecocritical Reading
of Lauren Beukes's *Zoo City*

Abstract: In the last two decades, planetary issues at the time of the Anthropocene, such as global warming, pollution, the slow violence of rampant capitalism, and the anthropocentric disregard for non-human animals have been increasingly tackled in science fiction narratives emerging from the 'peripheries' of the former Western Empire. As they guide us through alternative or futuristic wastelands, these postcolonial stories interrogate and re-imagine what it means to be human, or non-human, in a world of persisting inequalities and exploitation, inviting us to reconsider our ethical accountability to the Other(s). This article focuses on one of South Africa's most prominent voices in contemporary speculative fiction: Lauren Beukes, who, in her post-apartheid dystopian novel *Zoo City* (2010), skilfully intertwines postcolonial and ecocritical concerns. Interrogating 'the politics of waste' from both a socio-economic and ecological perspective, I analyse how the text brings to the fore the conjoined 'wastification' of the urban environment and its stricken residents, while spurring critical thought on the relationship between humans and non-human animals. In so doing, I argue that *Zoo City* simultaneously enacts a re-visioning of the concept of dystopia itself, thus falling under the rubric of Jessica Langer's 'anti-dystopia'.

Keywords: Postcolonial Science Fiction. Anti-Dystopia. Ecocriticism. Waste. Human-Animal Relationship.

1. *Introduction*

In the last two decades, the science fiction canon seems to have discovered and brought under its fold a plethora of narratives coming from the Empire's former 'peripheries'. These postcolonial stories are radically reconfiguring the boundaries and conceptual frameworks of a genre that has often been historically aligned with colonialism and the imperial projects of the Western world.[1] What the seemingly irreconcilable realms of postcolonial literature and science fiction appear to have in common is a mutual concern for the Other – human, alien, cyborg – and the ethics of Otherness; what changes, however, is the perspective that comes to be endorsed, as the colonial gaze is now reversed. Privileging the point of view of the *alien*-ated Other, postcolonial writers simultaneously appropriate and redirect the estranging devices of the SF genre, so as "to reimagine themselves and their world, to 'set the record straight' by dismantling the stereotypes that science fiction in part has helped to support, and in essence 'strike back' at the empire".[2] Questioning the ideological underpinnings of both the genre and the socio-historical world from which the genre itself has emerged, postcolo-

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[1] E.D. SMITH, *Globalization, Utopia and Postcolonial Science Fiction: New Maps of Hope*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 5.
[2] E. HOAGLAND and R. SARWAL (eds), *Science Fiction, Imperialism and the Third World: Essays on Postcolonial Literature and Film*, Jefferson, NC, and London, McFarland & Company, 2010, p. 6.

nial science fiction provides an alternative critical framework to interrogate the continuation of contemporary *neo*-colonial structures. While doing so, it variously engages with the figure of the Stranger, or the Other, in its many guises, interrogating what it means to be different in a world predominantly defined by globalisation and onrushing turbo-capitalism.

These encounters with alterity are often played out against the background of ecological waste-worlds, addressing an engagement with environmental concerns at the time of the Anthropocene.[3] Planetary issues such as global warming, pollution, the escalating waste crisis, the overexploitation of natural resources and disregard for non-human animals are indeed tackled in SF narratives coming from all corners of the former Empire, including South Africa. Despite being associated, in the minds of many, with images of charismatic megafauna in pristine parks and iconic landscapes, this country has been facing a very different reality. As Roos observes,

[o]ngoing reports on the growing danger of acid water dumping, park rangers involved in poaching and xenophobic violence in the face of dwindling services and resources abound. It is also meaningful that in current South African (English and Afrikaans) literature the representation of the environment leans demonstrably towards dystopia and images of destruction.[4]

The new millennium has indeed witnessed the efflorescence of ecologically-orientated dystopian works such as Jane Rosenthal's *Souvenir* (2004), Jenny Robson's *Savannah 2116 AD* (2004), Lauren Beukes's *Moxyland* (2008) and *Zoo City* (2010), Henrietta Rose-Innes's *Nineveh* (2011), Nick Wood's short stories "Thirstlands" (2008) and "Of Hearts and Monkeys" (2010), as well as Neil Blomkamp's Oscar-nominated film *District 9* (2009). Using common SF tropes of ecological catastrophe, human destruction and invasion, these texts share "not only the representation of a futuristic or alternative South African landscape, but also the expression of an entanglement between self, other, and environment".[5] As they guide us through post-apartheid landscapes of waste, they interrogate and re-imagine what it means to be human, or non-human, in a world of persisting inequalities and exploitation, thus inviting us to reconsider our ethical accountability.

In this article, I focus on Lauren Beukes's dystopian novel *Zoo City* (2010) as one of the most significant examples of this type of writing, reflecting what Anthony Vital has identified as "a new kind of concern for the environment emerging in the post-colonial era, one attuned to histories of unequal development and varieties of discrimination".[6] Internationally renowned as the winner of the 2011 Arthur C. Clarke Award for the "Best Science Fiction Novel of the Year", *Zoo City* is also a telling example of the power and challenges inherent in creative representation, showing how the SF genre can be adapted and transformed to narrate the Anthropocene in a postcolonial context.

The first section of this article provides a theoretical background that looks at the intersections between the critical fields of Postcolonialism and Ecocriticism. A second analytical

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[3] E. STEENKAMP, "Future Ecologies, Current Crisis: Ecological Concern in South African Speculative Fiction", in G. CANAVAN and K.S. ROBINSON (eds), *Green Planets: Ecology and Science Fiction*, Middletown, Wesleyan U.P., 2014, p. 145.

[4] H. ROOS, "'The War of the Worlds': Relocating the Boundaries between the Human and the NonHuman", *Journal of Literary Studies*, 27 (4), 2011, p. 52.

[5] E. STEENKAMP, "Future Ecologies, Current Crisis", p. 155.

[6] A. VITAL, "Towards an African Ecocriticism: Postcolonialism, Ecology and *Life & Times of Michael K*", *Research in African Literatures*, 39 (1), 2008, p. 90.

section will focus on Beukes's text and emphasise how environmental drawbacks are here inextricably entangled with socio-political and economic issues affecting South Africa, as well as with a radical re-thinking of the relationship between human and non-human animals.

2. *Intersecting Postcolonialism and Ecocriticism*

Navigating the imbrication of the environmental, social and political is a central focus of postcolonial Ecocriticism, a recently emerging and interdisciplinary field which stresses the need to bring together postcolonial and ecological insights as a means of challenging ongoing imperialist practices of social and environmental exploitation. As Alonso and Traseira explain, "postcolonial studies address environmental matters not only as a paramount problem in contemporary times, but as an ideology which is inherent in the imperial past of the Western world as well as in the historical dependence of the colonial past of European societies".[7] Along similar lines, Graham Huggan points out that the critical lens of postcolonial Ecocriticism recognises "the inseparability of current crises of ecological mismanagement from historical legacies of imperialistic exploitation and authoritarian abuse".[8] This means, in other words, that "environmental issues cannot be separated from questions of social justice and human rights".[9]

One of the most prominent voices in the discussion of possible and fruitful collaborations between Ecocriticism and Postcolonial Studies is undoubtedly Rob Nixon. In his well-known study, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), he resorts to the concept of "slow violence" to describe "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all".[10] It is the unspectacular but "incremental and accretive"[11] violence wrought by climate change, deforestation, toxic drift and other environmental catastrophes that, while rapidly ignored by a rampant capitalism, exacerbates the conditions of the poor in the Global South. Conjugating the discourses of ecologism, anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism, Nixon thus calls attention to the environmental conditions of the disempowered and the displaced in the post-imperial world, where neo-colonial and capitalist forces continue to exploit both the environment and its inhabitants.

As he launches the possibility of postcolonial ecologies, he is nevertheless aware that "within literary studies, such crossover work was long inhibited by a widespread assumption that the subjects and methodologies of the two fields were divergent".[12] He outlines four main discrepancies that seemed to arise – and still arise – between Postcolonialism and Ecocriticism:

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[7] M. ALONSO ALONSO and M.J. CABARCOS TRASEIRA, "A Legacy of Waste: Reflections on Literature and the Environment", *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 55 (2), 2019, p. 51.

[8] G. HUGGAN, "Greening Postcolonialism: Ecocritical Perspectives", *Modern Fiction Studies*, 50 (3), 2004, p. 702.

[9] *Ibidem*, p. 704.

[10] R. NIXON, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Cambridge, MA, and London, Harvard U.P., 2011, p. 6.

[11] *Ibidem*.

[12] *Ibidem*, p. 234.

First, postcolonialists tended to foreground hybridity and cross-culturation. Ecocritics, on the other hand, historically were drawn more to discourses of purity: virgin wilderness and the preservation of 'uncorrupted' last great places. Second, postcolonial writing and criticism was largely concerned with displacement, while environmental literary studies tended to give priority to the literature of place. Third, and relatedly, postcolonial studies tended to favour the cosmopolitan and the transnational. Postcolonialists were typically critical of nationalism, whereas the canons of environmental literature and criticism developed within a national (and often nationalistic) American framework. Fourth, postcolonialism devoted considerable attention to excavating or reimagining the marginalized past: history from below and border histories, often along transnational axes of migrant memory. By contrast, within much environmental literature and criticism, something different happened to history. It was often repressed or subordinated to the pursuit of the timeless, solitary moments of communion with nature.[13]

Broadly speaking, postcolonialists see the tendency towards individualism and 'mysticism' of many deep ecologists as the sign of a retreat from real political engagement, if not a downright complicity in the construction of colonialist discourses based on the tropes of 'virgin landscapes' and 'wilderness'. Deep ecologists, for their part, consider Postcolonialism as inherently human-centered and anthropocentric, primarily concerned with social and racial justice.[14] From a postcolonial perspective, plans of ecological intervention based on tenets of 'botanical restoration' and 'conservation' – such as the construction of national parks – are indeed controversial, as they often clash with problems of indigenous displacement and dispossession, inextricably tied to histories of anti-colonial struggles, forced removals and, as is the case with South Africa, racial segregation.

Quite understandably, a postcolonial take on Ecocriticism aims to move beyond a sheer aesthetics of landscape and botanical research to investigate the role of race and the politics of land use, together with questions of agency. In "Against Authenticity: Global Knowledges and Postcolonial Ecocriticism" (2007), Cara Cilano and Elizabeth DeLoughrey draw particular attention to the fact that Ecocriticism has often until recently privileged the sphere of an idealised racial subject – Western, white, male.[15] They also warn against the danger of adopting a global or universal ecological stance such as those buttressed by deep ecologists, who apparently claim the right to establish what is right or wrong, or most effective, in a 'Third World' context, too. In this perspective, "the nonwestern subject and landscape become the *tabula rasa* upon which to inscribe the agency of the western ecologist",[16] whose measures and strategies are deemed to be universally applicable. Blind to the wide variety of epistemologies that could be addressed to articulate human relationships with the environment, such an approach ends by reinscribing a center-periphery binary, that is to say, a model of naturalised white Western privilege that reminds of old colonial hierarchies.

Within this framework, postcolonial Ecocriticism has therefore emerged as a socially inflected ecocritical approach that is sensitive to the tension between humanistic and ecological concerns and is sceptical of Western liberal universalism.[17] Rather than promoting lyrical

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[13] *Ibidem*, p. 236.

[14] G. HUGGAN, "Greening Postcolonialism", p. 702.

[15] C. CILANO and E. DELOUGHREY, "Against Authenticity: Global Knowledges and Postcolonial Ecocriticism", *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 14 (1), 2007, p. 76.

[16] *Ibidem*, p. 71.

[17] In recent years, a series of studies have been published by scholars attempting to bring into dialogue

admiration for the pastoral or indulging in an aesthetic appreciation of the wild, postcolo-
nial ecocritics are more attuned to the socio-historically situated approach of the Environ-
mental Justice movement, which focuses on eco-social issues such as urban poverty, unequal
development, maldistribution of resources, land disputes, and environmental racism.[18]

The assessment of the urban space is particularly relevant for postcolonial ecocritics,
since, as remarked by Laura White, "the most crucial environmental issues facing the Global
South" are "urban poverty, waste management, housing and urban development".[19] This
inevitably entails abandoning arguments that rely on "an outmoded definition of 'nature'
as wilderness or pastoral – as something that *does not exist* in urban settings",[20] to start fo-
cusing on the built environment as well. As ecocritic Anthony Lioi has aptly observed, "de-
spite its desire to affirm Earth, much of ecocritical culture has been dirt-rejecting. In our
quest to promote wildness and non-anthropocentric cosmologies, ecocritics have shunned
texts and places comprised by matter-out-of-place, the ritual uncleanness of cities, sub-
urbs, and other defiled ecosystems".[21] Such an approach, according to Heather Sullivan,
risks contributing to "the dichotomy dividing our material surroundings into a place of
'pure, clean nature' and the dirty human sphere",[22] thus validating and re-affirming that
very mode of binary thinking – environment/humanity, nature/culture – that ecocritics
(and postcolonial scholars as well) have been trying to dismantle.

Heeding Sullivan's call to approach "the less glamorous and less colorful components
of dirt in both the built environment and other landscapes",[23] Simal-González has recent-
ly postulated a "Waste Theory" (2019) that intersects the discourses of (material) Ecocrit-
icism, Postcolonialism and Globalisation Studies. Bringing into dialogue Sullivan's 'dirty
aesthetics' with Nixon's concept of 'slow violence' and the environmentalism of the poor,
he explains that "[w]hat Waste Theory adds to previous ecocritical work is the conviction

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the two schools of criticism. See G. HUGGAN and H. TIFFIN, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals,
Environment*, London and New York, Routledge, 2010; U.P. MUKHERJEE, *Postcolonial Environments: Nature,
Culture, and the Contemporary Indian Novel*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010; L. WRIGHT, *'Wilderness
into Civilized Shapes': Reading the Postcolonial Environment*, Athens, University of Georgia Press, 2010; E.
DELOUGHREY and G. HANDLEY, *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*, Oxford, OUP, 2011; K.
CRANE, *Myths of Wilderness in Contemporary Narratives: Environmental Postcolonialism in Australia and Canada*,
New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012; R. BARTOSCH, *EnvironMentality: Ecocriticism and the Event of Postcolonial
Fiction*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2013.

[18] In essence, Environmental Justice is premised on the conviction that environmental problems are not
simply rooted in anthropocentric attitudes, but rather stem from systems of domination of humans by other
humans. Intersecting the discourses of environmentalism and civil rights activism, it strengthens the link between
the social inequities faced by poor communities and the uneven distribution of environmental hazards, such as
toxic waste dumping or air and water pollution. See D. SCHLOSBERG, *Defining Environmental Justice: Theories,
Movements, and Nature*, Oxford, OUP, 2007.

[19] L. WHITE, "Beyond the Eco-flâneur's Footsteps: Perambulatory Narration in Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*",
quoted in B. STANLEY and W.D. PHILLIPS, "South African Ecocriticism: Landscapes, Animals, and Environmental
Justice", in G. GARRARD (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism Online*, Oxford, OUP, 2017, https://www.
oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935338.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199935338-e-154 (last
accessed on 28 August 2020).

[20] B. STANLEY and W.D. PHILLIPS, "South African Ecocriticism".

[21] A. LIOI, "Of Swamp Dragons: Mud, Megalopolis, and a Future for Ecocriticism", quoted in H. SULLIVAN,
"Dirt Theory and Material Ecocriticism", *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 19 (3), Summer
2012, p. 516.

[22] H. SULLIVAN, "Dirt Theory and Material Ecocriticism", p. 515.

[23] *Ibidem*.

that toxic environments need to be discussed alongside the toxic configurations of power that transform human beings into literal or figurative waste".[24] As he shifts from the rather neutral concept of 'dirt' to the more anthropogenic connotations and the socio-economic, ideological implications inherent in 'waste', Simal-González invites scholars to investigate the interconnection between the 'wastification' of the environment and the commodification of subalterns, those 'residual' people who take the strain of the current global configurations of power and neo-colonial regimes. As he puts it, "Waste Theory can help critics to expose the intriguing ways in which narratives reflect and critique the 'conjoined ecological and human disposability' […] characteristic of our 'throwaway society'".[25] As we will see, such a critical approach proves particularly useful for the analysis of Beukes's novel.

The considerations so far set out, however, have primarily focused on the relation between humans and the non-human environment, excluding from the latter category the non-human species. In *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (2010), Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin point out that any discussion about animals within a postcolonial context needs to start from the interrogation of the anthropocentrism underlying Western Eurocentric thought, considering how anthropocentrism has been historically used to justify forms of colonial oppression premised on the construction of the Other as 'animal', meaning 'primitive', 'inferior', 'other-than-human'.[26] The hierarchisation of life forms resulting from such modes of construction was and remains responsible for colonialist and racist exploitation, as well as for continuing forms of speciesism that reflect humans' failure to situate animals ethically. Accordingly, Huggan and Tiffin explain that

[i]f the wrongs of colonialism – its legacies of continuing human inequalities, for instance – are to be addressed, still less redressed, then the very category of the *human*, in relation to animals and environment, must also be brought under scrutiny. After all, traditional western constitutions of the human as the 'not-animal' have had major, and often catastrophic, repercussions not just for animals themselves but for all those the West now considers human but were formerly designated, represented and treated as animal. The persistence of such openly discriminatory categorisations invites an endless repetition of the wrongs of the past.[27]

Within this framework, it becomes crucial to disaggregate animality from the negative stereotypes with which it has been associated in colonialist discourse, in a joint effort to rehabilitate the agency of non-human others and restore dignity to debased humans as well. If animals have value, then we cannot oppress other humans *as* animals, since animals have an inherent worth.

In *Zoo City*, as the title suggests, we will see precisely how the author skilfully works upon the concept of the 'Other as animal' that corroborated the colonial enterprise and that allegedly keeps transmuting into new shapes in contemporary South Africa. This dystopian text has both human and non-human characters explore a highly polluted, toxic cityscape in a not-too-distant future. Interrogating "the politics of 'waste'"[28] from both a

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[24] B. SIMAL-GONZÁLEZ, "'The Waste of the Empire': Neocolonialism and Environmental Justice in Merlinda Bobis's 'The Long Siesta as a Language Primer'", *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 55 (2), 2019, p. 2010.

[25] *Ibidem*.

[26] G. HUGGAN and H. TIFFIN, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*, p. 5.

[27] *Ibidem*, pp. 18-19.

[28] B. SIMAL-GONZÁLEZ, "'The Waste of the Empire'", p. 209.

socio-economic and ecological perspective, it powerfully brings to the fore the topical is-
sues of environmental degradation and urban decay, while spurring critical thought on the
relationship between human and non-human animals.

3. *Waste and Wasted Humans in Lauren Beukes's* Zoo City

Set in 2011, just a year after its publication, Beukes's novel presents a dark and alternative
view of a near-future Johannesburg where a syndrome called "Acquired Aposymbiotic
Familiarism" (AAF), or "Zoo Plague", has recently brought about an ontological shift.
Humans who have committed a serious crime are in fact paired with an animal familiar
(possibly an outward manifestation of their guilt), which bestows on them a magical power
called *mashavi*. The people who get 'animalled' are referred to as "zoos" or "aposymbiots",
and they all live in the inner-city Johannesburg ghetto of Zoo City (based on real Hillbrow,
a neighbourhood most commonly associated with "danger, criminality, marginality, and
blackness",[29] as well as with large flows of migrants from the African continent). As long
as their animals are alive, zoos are safe from the permanent and terrible threat of "The Un-
dertow", or "shadow self-absorption" (p. 187), a mysterious dark force which is capable of
totally disintegrating the animalled.

In this context, the novel recounts the story of a young black woman and ex-convict,
Zinzi December, who receives a sloth after getting her brother killed in a drug-related
shoot-out. To pay off her debts, she charges people for her magical skill of tracking lost
valuables, while using her abilities as a former journalist to write scam emails and ensnare
rich foreigners. Because of her supernatural talent, a renowned music producer, Odi Hu-
ron, asks her to investigate on the strange disappearance of Songweza, a teenage girl who,
together with her twin brother S'bu, is the star of a popular pop duo. As it happens, Odi
intends to find Songweza only to sacrifice both twins through a bloody ritual that will magi-
cally transfer his animal, a huge albino crocodile, to one of them.

As this brief summary suggests, despite its being awarded the UK's premier prize for
science fiction literature, the generic boundaries of Beukes's novel are quite permeable, as
they open up to include elements of urban fantasy, the crime novel, noir, and the mystery
thriller.[30] In particular, the incorporation of indigenous legends and practices brings ele-
ments of Magical Realism into play. Beukes herself has coined the neologism "*muti* [indi-
genous medicine] noir"[31] to describe her own text, where *muti*, a substance prepared by
a traditional healer (*sangoma*), is often used to help Zinzi solve her crimes, but is also con-
nected with the killing of people and animals to harvest their body parts for potent magic
(*muti* murders). Moreover, one of the many theories attempting to explain the phenom-
enon of aposymbiosis is drawn from Penny Miller's *Myths and Legends of Southern Africa*,
which is directly quoted in the novel. According to this explanation, animals would be
spirits of foreigners who cannot go back to the world of ancestors and are thus diverted by

[29] J. DICKSON, "Reading the (Zoo) City: The Social Realities and Science Fiction of Johannesburg", *The Salon: Imagining Africa's Future Cities*, 7, 2014, p. 67.

[30] S. GRAHAM, "The Entropy of Built Things: Postapartheid Anxiety and the Production of Space in Henrietta Rose-Innes' *Nineveh* and Lauren Beukes' *Zoo City*", *Safundi*, 16 (1), 2015, p. 66.

[31] L. Beukes in G. ANSELL, "Behind All the Monkey Business", *Mail & Guardian Online*, 6 May 2011, http://mg.co.za/article/2011-05-06-behind-all-the-monkey-business (last accessed on 30 August 2020).

a *sangoma* to animal hosts; humans who take possession of such accursed animals become themselves host to the spirit. As we will see, the fact that animalledness is associated with the spirits of foreigners establishes a connection between aposymbiots and the figures of refugees and illegal immigrants that populate the novel.

Zoo City combines science-fictional and spiritual elements into an internally consistent world, in which ancestors and ghosts are able to communicate with humans through emails and text messages, as well as through nature. As a *sangoma* explains to Zinzi, "[t]he spirits find it easier with technology. […] They still like rivers and oceans most of all, but data is like water – the spirits can move through it. That's why you get a prickly feeling around cell phone towers".[32] In this world inhabited by "[g]hosts in the machine" (p. 308), the spiritual, the natural, and the technological appear to be closely intertwined, while the boundaries between nature and culture, living and manufactured, are constantly transgressed[33] through vivid descriptions that bring the material and the natural together: "[g]unfire has become part of the nocturnal soundscape of Zoo City, like cicadas in the countryside" (p. 59); "the car horns [are] like the calls of mechanical ducks" (p. 140); "the traffic hums and buzzes. Fat drops of rain spatter like grease" (p. 212). As Graham observes, in *Zoo City* "urban infrastructure has become coexistent with nature, incorporating the spiritual and material worlds into the architecture of human social […] existence".[34]

This alternative Johannesburg is riddled with images of environmental degradation and urban decay, with "plastic bags hung on trees like Christmas decorations" (p. 159) and "the choke of stewing garbage and black mold floating up the stairwell" (p. 4) of crumbling buildings. Significantly, the novel opens with a reference to "morning light the sulfur color of the mine dumps" (p. 3), thus introducing the most iconic image of this urban landscape, i.e., the repulsive sites of abandoned gold mines. Zinzi's description eloquently speaks to the environmental impact and legacies of the mining activity:

I drive out south to where the last of the mine dumps are – sulphur-colored artificial hills, laid to waste by the ravages of weather and reprocessing, shored up with scrubby grass and eucalyptus trees. Ugly valleys have been gouged out and trucked away by the ton to sift out the last scraps of gold the mining companies missed the first time round. Maybe it's appropriate that *eGoli*, place of gold, should be self-cannibalizing. (p. 296)

The novel's portrayal of the city draws on the actual history and identity of Johannesburg, long known as the 'City of Gold' (or *eGoli*, in the Zulu language). The abandoned mineshafts look at its industrial past, when the colonial Empire exploited its vast riches of diamonds ("Johannesburg's Wild West days", p. 41). The environmental challenges embedded in a landscape polluted by mine waste and new sites of extraction speak to contemporary preoccupations in South Africa about acid-mine drainage and poisonous water.[35]

Everything in Beukes's cityscape seems to be decaying into "gritty yellow dust" (p.

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[32] EAD., *Zoo City*, New York, Boston and London, Little, Brown and Company, (2010) 2016, p. 198. All further references are to this edition; page numbers are given parenthetically in the text.

[33] H. ROOS, "'The War of the Worlds'", p. 61.

[34] B. SMITH, "SF, Infrastructure, and the Anthropocene: Reading *Moxyland* and *Zoo City*", *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*, 3 (3), 2016, p. 352.

[35] N. HOAD, "Dystopian Futures, Apartheid, and Postapartheid Allegories: Contemporary Imaginings of Johannesburg", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 36 (2), 2016, p. 295.

296), from the natural environment ("dusty yellow grasslands", p. 176; "the dusty scrub of the riverbank", p. 355) to objects ("to keep the dust off my clothes", p. 4; "the dusty beige of the wall", p. 15; "dusty high heels", p. 355) and people: "[E]ddies of dust whip and spiral around us. […] There is dust embedded in every hollow and fold of her body, banked up against her lower eyelids like unshed tears, encrusted in the bloody gashes over her arms and legs and stomach and head" (p. 297).[36] Throughout the text, bodies are represented as fully immersed in the permeating materiality of what Sullivan calls "the small-scale earth-forms of dirt, dust, and sand",[37] thus pointing to a further crossing of the boundaries between culture and nature, non-human and human matter. Sullivan's insights regarding a material environmental immersion are worth mentioning here:

[W]e live on Earth […] and are surrounded by dust. This dust emerges from our bodies, the particulate matter of air pollution, the stuff in buildings, and the desiccated landscapes of a warming world. Dirty nature is always with us as part of ongoing interactions among all kinds of material agents. […] there is no ultimate boundary between us and nature. We are enmeshed within dirt in its many forms.[38]

The darker side to the dissolution of body/environment boundaries, however, is that "dirt and dust can be highly toxic or radioactive, and thus can impose a destructively agentic influence onto most of the living things they contact".[39] In *Zoo City*, explicit reference is indeed made to sicknesses caused by pollution, such as asbestos-related lung disease or reactions to the black mold (p. 137).

As we follow Zinzi through her investigations to find Songweza or to track lost valuables, the novel maps a material mesh of dirt, bodies and things, especially when the protagonist descends from the city surface into the subterranean world of sewage systems, underground rails and derelict mine tunnels. Walking through the repugnant stormwater drains, she finds herself "shin-deep in shit […]. Not actual shit, at least, […] but years of musty rainwater and trash and rot and dead rats and used condoms make up their own signature fragrance" (p. 14). Later on, when she is chased by a bunch of young criminals living in the tunnels, she is pervaded by "the smell of smoke, and sweat and urine. […] My sneakers squelch in the rivulet of rotten mud" (p. 216). Throughout the text, the constant occurrence of the scatological trope contributes to providing a material depiction of a degraded and godforsaken place. As the author herself explained, "I wanted the journey of my story to be vested in more corporeal things. Forget the soul, I wanted the sparking nerves, the guts, the pounding heart of the cityscape".[40]

As well as vertically, Beukes's journey allows us to explore the urban landscape horizontally, as Zinzi moves across different suburban areas that vary in terms of economic and

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[36] Interestingly enough, the colour yellow – connoting gold and pollution, and thus the very essence of *eGoli* – does not merely figure in images that describe a toxic or arid environment, but is also used recursively to single out various objects ("the yellowwood table", p. 86; "the milky yellow liquid", p. 204; "the sagging nicotine-yellow couch", p. 263; "the sunshine-yellow satin robe […] drenched in blood", p. 327). It is also associated with people's physical traits, as emblematised by the haunting image of Yellow Man, a young "yellow-eyed" criminal that chases Zinzi in the storm drains of the city (pp. 213-20).

[37] H. SULLIVAN, "Dirt Theory and Material Ecocriticism", p. 516.

[38] *Ibidem*, p. 515

[39] *Ibidem*, p. 516.

[40] L. BEUKES, "Inner City: An Essay by Lauren Beukes", in EAD., *Zoo City*, p. 363.

social privilege. The festering slums of the inner city – built to keep the poor and 'unde-sirables' in – are juxtaposed with the gated communities of the rich, which are "fortified like privatized citadels" (p. 100). The erection of walls and barriers to separate the wealthy from the obscenely poor is a telling representation of what Dickson calls "the new spaces of an economic apartheid"[41] and reminds us of Rob Nixon's considerations on the global spreading of gated communities:

Neoliberalism's proliferating walls concretize a short-term psychology of denial: the delusion that we can survive long term in a world whose resources are increasingly unshared. The wall, read in terms of neoliberalism and environmental slow violence, materializes temporal as well as spatial denial through a literal concretizing of out of sight out of mind.[42]

In the neo-colonial realm of *Zoo City*, the dictum 'out of sight out of mind' is a fitting catchphrase for a world in which global-capitalist and consumeristic forces are completely ravaging the environment and widening the gap between the haves and the have-nots. While the government spends funds on "nuclear submarines or official pocket-lining" (p. 151) and a consumeristic culture turns even Steve Biko into a brand (p. 148), the inhabit-ants of the inner-city ghetto live in sordid conditions with water scarcity and a shortage on power supplies, throwing their rubbish out the window.

Corrupted by sex, drugs, alcohol, and crime, Zoo City is inhabited by disaffected out-siders, such as refugees, prostitutes, addicts, street children and, above all, 'animalled' criminals: "[m]urderers, rapists, junkies. Scum of the earth. In China they execute zoos on principle. Because nothing says guilty like a spirit critter at your side" (p. 375). Dangerous and un-needed, the zoos are relegated to a decrepit house development that basically func-tions as dumping ground for all those who are 'expelled' from society and literally kept 'out of sight'.[43] Condemned to a life of destitution and struggling to survive, they are deprived of police protection and simply left to kill one another ("the cops and ambulances are slow to respond to 'incidents' in Zoo City – if they respond at all", p. 140). When a bear gets killed by *tsosis* during the night and The Undertow comes to pulverise the human, the story is totally ignored by newspaper reports.

In the economy of the novel, then, Zoo City is strikingly framed as a garbage dump – a South African version of Samuel Delany's "Junk City"[44] –, while its residents acquire the traits of waste itself. Throughout the story, they are treated as second-class citizens and literally stigmatised as "scum" or "things", as the following comment by an Internet user amply testifies to:

[41] J. DICKSON, "Reading the (Zoo) City", p. 73.

[42] R. NIXON, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, p. 20.

[43] In this perspective, a parallel is also drawn in the text with old colonialist attitudes that tended to discard the 'social trash' of European societies by flushing it down to the colonies. When Zinzi visits a rehabilitation centre for addicts, she is told that "[a] lot of them are from the UK. It's a last resort for the families – that old attitude of 'send the troublemakers to the colonies!'" (p. 182).

[44] Delany describes the postmodern "Junk City" as a dysfunctional city in utter collapse, conveying "a very different image from Brave New World. Junk City begins, of course, as a working-class suburban phenomenon. Think of the car with half its motor and three wheels gone which has been sitting out in the yard beside that doorless refrigerator for the last four years" (S.R. DELANY, "On Triton and Other Matters", *Science Fiction Studies*, 17 [3], 1990, http://www.depauw.edu/sfs/interviews/delany52interview.htm [last accessed on 29 August 2020]).

[A]pos aren't human. It's right there in the name. Zoos. Animalled. Aposymbiots. Whatever PC term is flavor of the week. As in not human. As in short for 'apocalypse'. […] God is merciful, but only to actual, genuine, REAL LIFE human beings. Apos are criminals. They're scum. They're not even animals. They're just things. (p. 78)

The processes of *othering* and dehumanisation to which the animalled are constantly subjected are all too closely reminiscent of colonial and apartheid history. Explicit reference is indeed made to the need for "a pass system for zoos" (p. 33) and to potential practices of segregation ironically built on the difference between animal species ("Herbivores and carnivores all mixed up together. We should probably segregate", p. 89). The lingering violence from decades of institutionalised racism is further and most powerfully symbolised by Odi's albino crocodile, which the music producer keeps hidden in an underwater cavern directly connected to his swimming pool. As some critics have already noticed, the massive size and whiteness of this animal is a sardonic wink at one of the staunchest supporters of apartheid, Pieter Willem Botha, who was famously nicknamed 'Die Groot Krokodil' (or, 'The Big Crocodile').[45] The myriad of dismembered bodies and skeletons that Zinzi ultimately discovers in Odi's secret bunker falls heavily on a country that is still coping with a violent past and with apartheid's socio-economic and environmental legacy.

Zoo City, however, does not just pivot on a retrospective allegory of apartheid. It is also, and most importantly, a *post*-apartheid story reflecting on urgent contemporary issues in South Africa, such as the spread of HIV-AIDS (echoing in the acronym AAF – Acquired Aposymbiotic Familiarism), the intensification of xenophobia and the refugee crisis.[46] In 2008, South Africa was indeed rattled by a nationwide outbreak of xenophobic violence against immigrants from other African countries (derogatorily named *makwerekwere*), as if the presence of 'strangers' would further imperil access to resources. The horror of these black-on-black attacks has perceivingly inspired Beukes's novel, whose Zoo City is full of 'animalled' refugees from across the African continent. Concern about their condition finds an outlet via the figure of Zinzi's lover, Benoît, an animalled refugee who has run away from the atrocities of the Congo War after being separated from his (presumably dead) wife and children. Confirming real Hillbrow's reputation as a famous transit point for thousands of migrants, Beukes's novel and its ostracised animalled speak to how the discourse of colonialism, premised on an 'us vs. them' rhetoric, feeds into a neo-colonial perspective of violence, exploitation and forms of inequalities exacerbated by fear.

Besides functioning as a metaphor for humans and various forms of discrimination, the zoo as literary sign is associated with a wide range of more strictly ecological discourses. One of the many theories attempting to explain the sudden appearance of the animalled, the Toxic Reincarnation Theory, explicitly links aposymbiosis to a disruption in the spiritual realm caused by global warming, pollution and BPA from plastic leaching into the environment (p. 183). According to others, the phenomenon could have been equally triggered by chemical waste and radiations, resulting from the fallout of Pakistan's nuclear tests (p. 75) or the Chernobyl disaster (p. 282). While bringing to the fore fundamental issues at the time of the Anthropocene, such allegorical readings do not exhaust, however, the po-

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[45] C. STOBIE, "Dystopian Dreams from South Africa: Lauren Beukes's *Moxyland* and *Zoo City*", *African Identities*, 10 (4), 2012, p. 77; N. HOAD, "Dystopian Futures, Apartheid, and Postapartheid Allegories", p. 301.

[46] See N. HOAD, "Dystopian Futures, Apartheid, and Postapartheid Allegories". For further insights into the link between aposymbiosis and HIV-AIDS in particular, see S. GRAHAM, "The Entropy of Built Things", p. 74.

tential inherent in Beukes's trope of aposymbiosis, which most evidently resides in the very coexistence and imbrication of human and non-human lives. As Smith aptly observes, it is important to avoid "metaphorising the notion of the aposymbiot in a way that evacuates the human-animal relationship of its ecological significance",[47] as such a mode of reading fails to recognise that non-humans themselves are implicated in the concerns of the text.

In the world of ecology, the term 'aposymbiosis' describes a form of symbiosis in which two species live independently but with their life cycles affecting one another. In *Zoo City*, the animalled and their animal familiars share a telepathic connection and they are both emotionally and physically linked: when Zinzi gets drunk, Sloth becomes tipsy himself, and when she is injured, Sloth suffers from the same pain. Although the reverse does not happen ("[o]ur connection is one-way. I can't feel his pain, but it's bad enough to see it in his face", p. 316), humans experience unbearable physical pain if they are separated from their animal companions ("[c]rack cravings have nothing on being away from your animal", p. 147). The connection between humans and non-humans is so strong that when the animal dies, the human immediately passes away, too; animals, by contrast, can outlive their humans for a while, although "they're never quite the same" (p. 349). Significantly, then, in Beukes's imaginary world the well-being of the animal and that of the human are shown to be mutually dependent.

In the novel, however, a caring and non-exploitative model of behaviour towards animals exists side by side with violent and abusive relationships. For instance, a young criminal living in the storm drains, emblematically named 'Nasty', has chopped a porcupine's leg to sell it to the black market for *muti* (p. 98). In a series of interviews of animalled prisoners around the world, a man from Pakistan describes the way animals are used as a means of social control:[48] "They keep our animals in cages in another part of the prison. We don't see them. When they want to torture us, they out them in the back of a car and drive away to Keti Bandar. The pain is unbearable, you scream, you vomit, and you say anything" (p. 98). *Zoo City* thus proceeds to single out different forms of human/animal relationships, denouncing humans' exploitative thrust in favour of mutual and reciprocal relationships that are best exemplified through Zinzi and her Sloth. In Steenkamp's words, "this imaginative coupling suggests the kind of sympathetic experience that challenges the perceived divide between humans and animals that allows for the domination of the latter by the former".[49] Through its imaginative inter-species connections, the novel showcases the vitality and agency of non-human animals and emphasises how they are always implicated in human lives and experiences. In this perspective, as Smith points out, *Zoo City* is not merely "a speculative account of urban life, but […] a *speculative multispecies ethnography*, an analysis of what happens when human and nonhuman lives are understood as entwined".[50]

At the same time, the unsettling of the boundaries between humans and non-humans calls attention to the predicament and ethics of humanness.[51] As previously mentioned (par. 2), the story of racism in the colonial world was imbricated into discourses of species-

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[47] B. Smith, "SF, Infrastructure, and the Anthropocene", p. 350.

[48] *Ibidem*.

[49] E. Steenkamp, "Familiar Animals: The Question of Human-Animal Relationships in Lauren Beukes's *Zoo City*", in S. Oppermann (ed.), *New International Voices in Ecocriticism*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2015, p. 182.

[50] B. Smith, "SF, Infrastructure, and the Anthropocene", pp. 350-51.

[51] J. Dickson, "Reading the (Zoo) City", p. 76.

ism: Beukes's novel is precisely built on the trope of the 'Other as animal' that was used for racial vilification and abuse, and that remains prominent in neo-colonial regimes, where it re-emerges in the form of xenophobic violence. The equivalence is highlighted in the text when Zinzi comments that "[ap]parently we attracted vermin because we were vermin" (p. 62). In this perspective, the need to rehabilitate the animal should be seen as going hand in hand with a radical rethinking of the very category of the human. Drawing on Huggan and Tiffin's considerations, the point is not to prioritise non-human concerns over human issues, but rather to show that, "while there is still the 'ethical acceptability' […] of the killing of non-human others – that is, anyone represented and designated as non-human [in Beukes's novel, the 'animalled'] – [human] abuses will continue […] there is no political purchase in such issues being addressed by a 'first-things-first' approach. They must proceed together".[52] The corporeal, psychic, emotional and ethical bond that links the animalled to their animal familiars allows Beukes to construct a new model of relational and intersubjective identity, opening up the possibility for a revised, empathic relationship with alterity, in its many guises.

Ultimately, then, Beukes's re-imagined Johannesburg is represented as a dystopian underworld where spaces of connection, intimacy, and solidarity – as well as unexpected visions of decadent beauty (p. 140) – manage to come into view. Rather than sensationalising poverty and crime, the text looks at subjectivities that are much more complex, vital and hybrid than it might be gathered at first sight. See, for instance, the following passage:

People who would happily speed through Zoo City during the day won't detour here at night, not even to avoid police roadblocks. They're too scared, but that's precisely when Zoo City is at its most sociable. From 6 p.m., when the day-jobbers start getting back from whatever work they've been able to pick up, apartment doors are flung open. Kids chase each other down the corridors. People take their animals out for fresh air or a friendly sniff of each other's bums. The smell of cooking – mostly food, but also meth – temporarily drowns out the stench of rot, the urine in the stairwells. The crack whores emerge from the dingy apartments to chat and smoke cigarettes on the fire escape, and catcall the commuters heading to the taxi rank on the street below. (p. 136)

Born out of marginalisation, the dark and dangerous waste-world of Zoo City is a radically *inclusive* and *open* space, a microcosm of subalternity offering a critical vantage point from which to read and judge the socio-spatial dispensations of democracy and globalisation in post-apartheid South Africa.

In this perspective, the novel can be said to bring about a re-visioning of the concept of dystopia itself and fall under the rubric of what Jessica Langer has recently labelled 'anti-dystopia'.[53] Indeed, her analysis of some postcolonial SF narratives characterised by urban settings provides a useful critical lens to read the peculiar configurations of power emerging in Beukes's novel. In essence, her main argument is that what makes these cities dystopic is not simply the social, physical and moral deterioration of their broken residents, but rather the processes of expulsion and confinement that have made those very dystopian worlds possible. As she explains:

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[52] G. HUGGAN and H. TIFFIN, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*, pp. 137-38. The novel's ironic wordplay on the "Animalled rights movement" (p. 79) can be seen to point in the direction of such a conjuncture.

[53] J. LANGER, "The Shapes of Dystopia: Boundaries, Hybridity and the Politics of Power", in E. HOAGLAND and R. SARWAL (eds), *Science Fiction, Imperialism and the Third World: Essays on Postcolonial Literature and Film*, Jefferson, NC, and London, McFarland & Company, 2010, pp. 171-87.

Beneath the surface dystopianism of the violence and cacophony of these metropolitan spaces lies a positive hybridity and the potential for subversion of [neo-]colonial norms: the violence and cacophony are caused by the position the colonizer or the powerful has put the inhabitants in, not by the inhabitants themselves. The dystopic elements in these texts are produced by power differentials, not by inherent differences between powerful and powerless.[54]

In *Zoo City*, this is compellingly linked to the discovery that Odi Huron himself is a zoo and that his glamorous, wealthy world is actually pervaded by rottenness and decay: in his house, significantly built by an architect of the British Empire, "[l]ethargic dust motes swirl in sunlight that has managed to penetrate the choke of ivy and leaded glass" (p. 86) and "a skin of rotting leaves cloy[s] the surface" of the swimming pool, whose mosaic tiles "are chipped, the lapis-lazuli blue faded to a dull glaucoma" (p. 88). By the same token, his crocodile is described as "sickly white" (p. 333), while the gated communities to which he belongs are inhabited by "*festering* middle class paranoia" (p. 97; emphasis added). Invalidating the common binary classifications of colonial thought, which tended to associate 'filth' with the powerless and disenfranchised, dirt is here likewise connected with the cast-offs and the privileged middle class.

Coming close to L.T. Sargent's conceptualisation of 'critical dystopia',[55] Langer defines anti-dystopia "not as a mirror image of dystopia, nor a direct contradiction, but rather a generic tendency that uses the tool of dystopia recursively, to complicate and question both the form itself, with its Manichean character, and the zero-world to which the form and its use refer".[56] Relativising the utopia/dystopia dichotomy, whose either/or construction, she suggests, reminds us of the building of colonial power ("the center, the utopian included, and the periphery, the utopian excluded/dystopian included"[57]), anti-dystopia becomes a space of internal contradiction, contamination and heterogeneity. Within this framework, *Zoo City* can be assessed as an anti-dystopian text, insofar as it falls both *within* and *outside* the utopia/dystopia construct; weaving a web of varied and interrelated discourses, it conjures up a world where toxic environments equal toxic configurations of power relations, while simultaneously complicating any simplistic categorisation of victim and victimiser (zoos *are*, after all, criminals).

Despite the horror and utter desolation of the world described, which inexorably leads up to the gruesome murder of the pop star duo and the near-death of Benoît in Odi's underground lake, the novel closes on a slightly positive note. Instead of slipping back to a life of drugs, alcohol and random sex, as she once did (pp. 271-76), Zinzi ultimately decides to traverse the continent from South Africa to the Democratic Republic of Congo in order to track down, and hopefully reunite, Benoît's missing family. Her comment that this journey "is going to be the best thing I've done with my miserable life" (p. 358) suggests an acceptance of responsibility and thus seems to reflect a prospect of change, or, at least, an attempt to resist dehumanisation.

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[54] *Ibidem*, 173.

[55] Thomas Moylan succinctly defines it as "a textual mutation that self-reflexively takes on the present system and offers not only astute critiques of the order of things but also explorations of the appositional spaces and possibilities from which the next round of political activism can derive imaginative sustenance and inspiration" (T. MOYLAN, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*, Boulder, Westview Press, 2000, p. xv). For a reading of *Zoo City* through the lens of critical dystopia, see C. STOBIE, "Dystopian Dreams from South Africa".

[56] J. LANGER, "The Shapes of Dystopia", pp. 185-86.

[57] *Ibidem*, p. 186.

4. *Conclusion*

By means of its 'animalled' characters, *Zoo City* cleverly intertwines human and environmental concerns, transgressing and confounding the boundaries between nature and culture, clean and unclean, human and non-human, spiritual and technological, national and foreign, local and global. Connecting ecocritical issues with human-rights discourses, this postcolonial SF text shows how, in Steenkamp's words, "[h]eeding the call to responsibility for our human others and being sensitive to the agency of non-human others […] is not mutually exclusive".[58] Through its view of humans and non-humans entangled in the same ecological devastation, the novel provides an alternative, renewed configuration of the human subject as a non-unitary, *transversal* entity, fully immersed in a network of material, spiritual and non-human relations.

This questioning and expanding of the frontiers of the human goes hand in hand with, and is made possible by, a simultaneous broadening of the frontiers of the text and a radical experimentation in genre practice. The fact that *Zoo City* adopts the perspective of a young black woman is particularly relevant, as it challenges the general tendency of Western science fiction to represent the human as predominantly white and male.[59] This is further achieved by incorporating subaltern spiritualities into the text; as Stobie aptly remarks, Beukes skilfully resorts to "polivocality, magical realism and her original fusion, *muti* noir, to expand her novel beyond narrowly Western, androcentric models. Traditional African belief systems are given respectful credence and symbolic power".[60] Rather than dealing with an invented or unmoored magic, the text opens up a space for a non-dominant spiritualism within traditional science fiction narrative: in so doing, Beukes acknowledges indigenous worldviews and learning modes and gives them value by placing them firmly in the future. At the same time, however, she emphasises the necessity to properly draw on this kind of spirituality, which should recoil from an amoral use of both science and technology (i.e., Zinzi's illegal participation in Internet scams) and the spiritual sphere itself (i.e., the practice of *muti* murders).

Thanks to her innovative blend of magic, mystery and crime, Beukes deploys and profoundly re-shapes the genre of science fiction to explore issues of inclusion, eco-social justice and empathy towards otherness. As the author herself acknowledges, "the reason why science-fiction is important is because it gives you a distorting lens that makes reality clearer. It's inventive, it's surprising, it's imaginative, and it allows us to talk about the big issues and who we are in the world and where we are right now".[61] Her nightmarish fantasy of a future Johannesburg is a formally daring attempt to provide a critical perspective on the 'new' South Africa, holding up a mirror to the real-life perpetuation of structural discriminations and injustices. In so doing, the novel traces a *continuum* between the colonial history of oppression and the failed promises of the post-democratic government, using the trope of waste – in a literal and figurative sense – to denounce the *in*humanity of a 'dirty' system.

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[58] E. STEENKAMP, "Familiar Animals", p. 184.
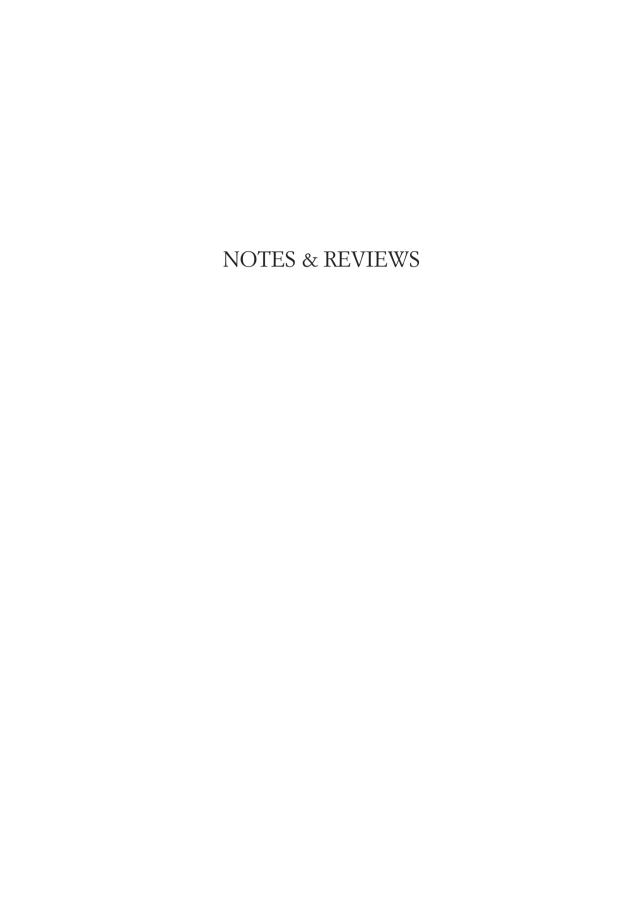[59] J. DICKSON, "Reading the (Zoo) City", p. 68.
[60] C. STOBIE, "Dystopian Dreams from South Africa", p. 379.
[61] L. BEUKES, "Lauren Beukes's Speech for the Arthur C. Clark Awards 2012", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1S0MsIrT3ZM (last accessed on 28 August 2020).

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NOTES & REVIEWS

FRANCESCA MUSSI

Elisa Bizzotto (ed.), *Mario Praz: Voice Centre Stage*
Bern, Peter Lang, 2019, pp. 239, ISBN 978-3-0343-3344-3

Mario Praz: Voice Centre Stage is a collection of essays that sets out to bridge a "substantial critical gap" (p. 25) in academic studies dealing with Mario Praz (Rome, 1896-1982), as Elisa Bizzotto, the editor of the volume, aptly underlines. Drawing on the contributions presented at a conference on this Italian literary scholar, art critic, translator and historian of culture, which was held at Iuav University of Venice in December 2016, this collection offers new insightful perspectives on one of the central figures of the twentieth-century intellectual *milieu* and international literary relations.

As Bizzotto observes, scholarship on Praz has so far shown various limitations, since it has failed to unveil the complex interdisciplinary dimension of this eminent author's *oeuvre* by generally privileging "literature and biography over the incredible range of his interests" (p. 22). *Mario Praz: Voice Centre Stage* thereby brings together national and international voices specialising in different branches of humanities research in order to offer a clearer and more encompassing picture of Praz as "not only a man of letters and art collector but also as a critic of art and architecture, literary and cultural theorist, travel writer, photography and cinema enthusiast and innovator in print culture" (p. 25).

For ease of reference, the contributions to the volume have been expertly categorised into three sections, namely, "Literature", "The Arts" and "Forms of Auto-Biography". This distinction, however, is not meant to be a rigid demarcation, as each chapter differently engages in dialogue with the three main areas of focus. This is evident from the very outset of the book, where Loretta Innocenti's essay "Word and Image: A Comparison between Two Languages" opens the literary section. Innocenti places emphasis on Praz's theoretical concern with the intersections between literature and the visual arts or, more broadly, "between verbal and visual texts, images and words" (p. 34). This concern has characterised all of Praz's scholarly career, as testified to, for example, by his work on emblems and devices in *Studi sul concettismo* (1934, enlarged in 1946) and his later volume *Mnemosine* (1970). In exploring symbolic texts such as emblems and devices, Innocenti argues, Praz clearly shows how "[t]he visual and the verbal are combined here in a single language", as "Siamese sisters, impossible to separate" (p. 35). In addition to shedding light on Praz's interactions with major figures of the twentieth-century critical and philosophical landscape, including Warburg, Curtius, Wellek and Propp, Innocenti duly recognises his concurrent capacity to re-evaluate and restore the dignity of "a genre [emblems and devices] that had been incredibly fashionable in the seventeenth century but was later relegated to the cabinet of curiosities" (p. 34).

This interdisciplinary dialogue further unfolds in Laura Scuriatti's contribution "Modernism and the Baroque: Two Strange Bedfellows in Mario Praz's *Oeuvre*", where she delves into both Praz's engagement with the ways literature and the arts crucially intersect and his prowess in establishing meaningful connections between the past and the present.

In this sense, Scuriatti pointedly highlights how, according to Praz, "the literature, art and culture of the past exist insofar as they are 'recognised' by successive generations, that is when successive generations, or authors, recognise themselves in them, when there is, in certain cases, a 'shock of recognition'" (p. 47). To support this argument, Scuriatti proceeds to discuss Praz's study of Baroque art and aesthetics, underlining how the Italian critic's version of the Baroque was closely related to his understanding of modernity and Modernism. In this process, she also assesses Praz's dialectic approach to Modernist authors, notably T.S. Eliot, as if he strove to establish a "deep affinity of sensibility" (p. 49), a kinship of emotional and aesthetic responses between the Baroque and Modernism, these being two epochs similarly engaged in a struggle with their recent past.

The "Literature" section closes with Renzo D'Agnillo's "Mario Praz: Beauty, Terror and the Artificial Man", which is the contribution that, more than others, focuses on the literary aspects of Praz's *corpus*. In particular, D'Agnillo explores Praz's investigation into the literary and artistic sensibility of the Gothic in the context of his introductory essay to the 1968 Penguin volume *Three Gothic Novels*, which included Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, William Beckford's *Vathek*, and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. D'Agnillo sees Praz's discussion of *Frankenstein* as the most intriguing part of that introduction. He also suggests that Praz can here be shown to expand his views on the topic as originally outlined in his internationally acclaimed *The Romantic Agony* (1933), which had counted no more than "three fleeting references" to Shelley's novel (p. 67). Significantly, whilst admitting that Praz's commentary on *Frankenstein* in the 1968 piece still seems to be left "in the realm of speculation", D'Agnillo emphasises that the Italian scholar "was one of the first critics to seriously address the technical aspects of Shelley's novel" (p. 73). Indeed, Praz drew attention to Shelley's interest in and familiarity with the 'masculine world' of science and technology of her time.

The second section of the volume focuses on "The Arts" and provides further evidence about Praz's engagement with varied forms of art, as well as his fascination with the eccentric and the bizarre. Among the four contributions that constitute this section, Lene Østermark-Johansen's essay "Framing Likeness and Otherness: Mario Praz and Wax Portraiture" is perhaps the most outstanding. Here Østermark-Johansen explores Praz's obsession with wax as a material for miniature sculpture. The result of this obsession is a fine collection of wax sculptures – ranging from portraits in profile and *en face* to devotional and mythological scenes – which is housed in the Museo Praz in Rome. Praz's wax collection, together with his literary production on wax sculpture, certainly attest to his fascination with the beautiful and the bizarre, "his taste for the tasteless" (p. 139), but also to his interest regarding questions of mimesis and representation. Building on Praz's "Le figure di cera in letteratura" (1938), Østermark-Johansen underscores "[wax's] ability to imitate human skin and flesh to an almost uncanny degree", thus collapsing "the boundary between original and image, sitter and representation, life and art in a way which makes us feel uncomfortable" (pp. 142-43). Crucially, she also places emphasis on the ephemeral nature of wax as an organic sculptural material, a condition that it shares with human corporality. In spite of being preserved behind frames and glass covers, "wax sculpture in Praz's private collection serves the function of *memento mori*" (p. 150).

Angelo Maggi's "Praz and the Camera Obscura of Memory" and Jonah Siegel's "Evil Eye: Mario Praz and the Superillustrated Text" continue this conversation on portraiture. On the one hand, Maggi examines Praz's interest in photography, stressing how it had for

him the power to trigger memories, "giv[ing] consistency to a lost time" (p. 109). When analysing Praz's remarks on photography, Maggi also observes how they possibly reveal an attempt at elevating it to the status of art. Borrowing Praz's words from his 1967 essay on portraiture, "Pittura di ritratto e fotografia", Maggi contends that "[p]hotography has a great deal to say about the person portrayed, but what is most certain is that, no less than a portrait, it has much to say about the photographer" (p. 111), thus foregrounding the creative role played by the photographer. On the other hand, Siegel turns his attention to Praz's later publications on art history, such as *Conversation Pieces* (1971) and *An Illustrated History of Interior Decoration* (1964), and suggests that these texts should be seen

as belonging to a particularly modern category, the twentieth-century superillustrated book, a genre only possible when the technologies of photography and of printing – not to mention the means of communication – have reached the point at which such extraordinary accumulations of images are conceivable. (p. 82)

These works, Siegel goes on to argue, contain signs of Praz's compulsion to both collect and display, his pleasure in accumulation and excess, and "a mood of voyeuristic fascination with gazing on the lives of others" in their informal day-to-day dimension, which "one cannot help reading as in some measure suggesting a failure to fully live among them" (p. 78). Interestingly, Siegel concludes his piece by reflecting on the ways Praz's *finesse* can also be seen to inform Luchino Visconti's 1974 film *Conversation Piece*, which is partly based on Praz himself and might be posited as an over-elaborate example of the superillustrated text (p. 100).

Sofia Magnaguagno's "Praz's Reception of Paolo Veronese: An Intercultural Dialogue" further strengthens the notion of Praz's rich and diverse research interests, which are here exemplified by his mastery in the field of European-art historical criticism, with specific regard to Venetian painter Paolo Veronese. In particular, Magnaguagno draws attention to the analogies between the styles of the Italian painter and William Shakespeare, which Praz had highlighted in his 1937 article "Shakespeare e lo schermo". While discussing a possible film adaptation of *Antony and Cleopatra*, Praz extolled Veronese's art as "a philologically appropriate scenography for film adaptation – or 'translation' as he calls it" (p. 126), thus envisaging a transcoding process between literature, painting and cinema. In addition to showing his profound knowledge of the Venetian master and his reception, "Shakespeare e lo schermo" attests to Praz's "anticipation of intermedial studies" (p. 135).

Moving to a more autobiographical dimension, the third and last section of the collection, "Forms of Auto-Biography", consists of three contributions that shed light on other aspects of Praz's large *corpus* and his intellectual interests and ideas. In "Unromantic Praz: Anti-Stereotyped Portraits of Cities and Places", Guido Zucconi focuses on Praz's writings on travel and underlines how this part of his *oeuvre* has attracted less critical attention, if compared to his works on literature and art. More specifically, Zucconi cites Praz's *Unromantic Spain* (1929), *Il Mondo che ho visto* (1982) and *Voce dietro la scena. Un'antologia personale* (1980) to discuss the Italian critic's approach to travel writing, which is supposed to aim "at getting rid of the commonplaces that prevented travellers from getting a fuller and more complex understanding of their experiences" (p. 156). The exploration of Praz's aforementioned works shows how he was committed to providing uncommon perspectives when portraying the places and cities he visited, so as to dismantle *clichés* and stereotypes. Zucconi goes on to observe that, to achieve this end, Praz also recommends that travel writers

should "ideally" complete and integrate their descriptions with "plenty of references – even fragmentary – to literature and art history" (p. 165), a suggestion that once again confirms a propensity for intercultural dialogues between disciplines.

As anticipated by the title of his contribution, "A 'Life inside my own Life': The Correspondence between Mario Praz and Vernon Lee", Stefano Evangelista focuses on the relationship between Praz and his mentor Vernon Lee by examining the unpublished 1920s letters between the two that are included in Lee's miscellaneous manuscripts housed in Somerville College, Oxford. These letters, Evangelista rightly contends, serve "both as platforms to establish [Praz's] authority *vis-à-vis* the older critic and laboratories of essayistic writing" (p. 168). Through a careful selection of extracts, Evangelista shows how a young and unexperienced Praz seeks and relies on Lee's advice to find his own academic voice "outside the Italian language" (p. 170). Lee played a key role in facilitating Praz's entry in foreign circles; for instance, she provided him with an important early contact with the *London Mercury*, which, in turn, allowed Praz to practise and reflect on his critical voice. Most significantly, Evangelista evaluates the essayistic tone of the letters and highlights how these also show Praz's evolution from a talented but naïve young author to a more confident and self-conscious critic.

Elisa Bizzotto's "Marius the Epicurean, Walter the Medusean: Praz's Paterian (Self-)Fashioning" is the last paper of the "Forms of Auto-biography" and the whole collection. This chapter treads a parallel path to the one taken by Evangelista, as Bizzotto decides to explore another fundamental figure in Praz's literary, artistic and cultural education (p. 29), namely, Walter Pater, who was both a "principal interest of Praz's work as a translator" and a "long-standing object of his critical attention" (p. 189). It is paramount, then, to closely examine Praz's relationship with the author of *Marius the Epicurean* and consider the ways in which Pater's work has informed Praz's identity as "a writer, critic and public intellectual" (p. 190). In particular, Bizzotto analyses Praz's engagement with two elements that show his indebtedness to Pater, that is, the house trope and the cultural myth of the "synthetic *femme fatale*", which he elaborates from Pater's description of *Mona Lisa* (p. 202). Besides pointing out the similarities and discrepancies between the two authors, Bizzotto claims that, although he failed to recognise that Pater had more to offer than his Decadent sensitivity, Praz's Paterian criticism was profoundly influential in Italy as well as worldwide.

Combining pluri- and interdisciplinary voices, *Mario Praz: Voice Centre Stage* makes a crucial contribution to the scholarship dedicated to Praz, shedding new light on his vast and eclectic research interests, intellectual achievements, and critical work. In the Introduction, Bizzotto remarks that individual studies on Praz have never been published outside of Italy, apart from a relatively unknown French exception (p. 21). In this sense, having chosen to write the papers in English certainly provides added value to the volume and helps to promote a national and international, but also intercultural, debate on Praz's centrality in the literary and cultural landscape of the twentieth century.