



contemporary fate of great cultural and literary myths

■

le destin contemporain des grands mythes culturels et
littéraires

■

die gegenwärtige Bestimmung der großen kulturellen und
literarischen Mythen

■

el destino contemporáneo de los grandes mitos culturales y
literarios

interlitteraria

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TARTU ÜLIKOOLI
KIRJASTUS

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The Secret Understanding of Souls in Lithuanian Literature

AUDINGA PELURITYTĖ

The phrase *the secret understanding of souls* was coined by a Lithuanian poet Sigitas Geda in 1983, the years of Soviet stagnation, when he developed the idea of a universal language of art; it stated that artists knew each other through the network of special symbolic relationships, as if in a special spiritual substance (Geda 1983: 143). *The secret understanding of souls* implied an idea that the language of art, in particular that of poetry, comprised experiences of sainthood and a feeling of eternity. At the same time in the 1980s and 1990s, Geda's phrase, *the secret understanding of souls*, circulated in discussions between poets and literary critics, as well as in articles and reviews, gaining a double meaning: (1) that of a universal language of art (secondary modelling systems, according to Lotman), which liberated for creation those who understood it; (2) that of a concrete Soviet epoch where art existed in captivity. Under such restrictions, artists had to invent a special means of communication, an Aesopian language. According to Dalia Satkauskytė, who has attempted to review the motifs and principles of Aesopian language in Soviet Lithuanian literature, in contrast to poetic language as Lotman's secondary modelling system, Aesopian language could be treated as a tertiary modelling system. This system is created not so much by the compression of linguistic links, but mostly on the basis of the contract between the reader and the author (Satkauskytė 2007: 105). According to Satkauskytė, in case of Aesopian language, we could only speak of more intense linguistic links determined by the play with censorship, which is only a more complicated communication system, and not just a form of an additional poetic meaning. Essentially, *the secret understanding of souls* referred to a symbolic expansion of the artist's self-expression

and freedom where unauthorised, illegal literary meanings of personal and social life functioned by having slipped through the sieve of censorship and being relevant to an individual of the said period.

In Aesopian language, made more complicated intuitively, and especially by poets, in the process of communication, we could detect today at least several additional cultural and humanistic meanings related to literature – from the ideological and political discourse to the subtleties of composing a dialogue. On the one hand, these manipulations with the possibilities of poetic language are irrelevant to the creation of new meanings (according to Satkauskytė, the reader of literature written in Aesopian language is not a partner in a dialogue, but a conspirator (*ib.* 105); and thus did not truly belong to the field of literature or art; however, on the other hand, this conspiracy gave an impulse to a tremendous outbreak of allegoric language valid among the players of allegoric conspiracy. This allegoric, unwritten but publicly elaborated and approved, language system between the reader and the author was regarded as a unified one, and was recognised from fragments. If these were only communication fragments established from time to time, we would not have today a seamless literary flow claiming to be a self-reflecting Soviet literature tradition, injured, but maintained and re-established by educated literary authorities. Meanwhile, the outstanding names of Soviet literature, official and unofficial authorities, were regarded as steadfast points of reference in the world of literature, and as such they were included into the 20th century historiography (e.g. Kubilius 1995: 369–401, 508–615). One of the most important proofs of perceiving the injured communication could be its educative tone when compromise-prone Lithuanian literary researchers still recorded a certain field of repeating meanings by focusing on the meanings prevailing in the aforementioned communication. In other words, we could speak, in essence, if not about an emergence of additional meaning, then about an additional twist, a niche, or an aggregate of the field of valid cultural meanings where the process of meaning transformations and that of qualitative meaning mutations took place, as if, during a chemical reaction.

It is unlikely that we could claim so straightforwardly that in the state of the transformation of a different poetical meaning we could not discern an emergence of a new poetical meaning. Only this meaning appears differently than the trope (transposition) which we can easily understand. As the Lithuanian literary theorist Regimantas Tamošaitis

has put it: "The power of art lies in the metaphor. [...] The weakness of art is allegory, the principle of a direct allegory. Allegory relates the work of art to the phenomena of life and restricts it by pragmatic purposefulness and turns creation into a means to solve a certain problem. An allegoric work of art is an illustration of truth, but not the truth itself. An illustration is always a product of a creative activity of secondary significance and not a self-contained value." (Tamošaitis 2004: 2) The allegorical way of thinking in Soviet literature did not form on the basis of one narrative, one motif, but was generated in the whole space of literature's thinking about the world, the human being and their interrelationship. Owing to a strangely mutated Soviet censorship some strange things were prohibited in Lithuanian literature, not in the post-war period, but already in the 'epoch of mature socialism'; for instance, it was forbidden not only to mention occupation or totalitarian violence – that was obvious – but also to talk about one's wish to travel around the world, having one's own system of values, an individual philosophy of life, and even more so, religious beliefs. Christianity was persecuted in particular; all related information was censored. Thus a paradoxical situation arose when Christian values were persecuted, while other religious systems – Buddhism, Hinduism, Shamanism, old cultures – could be freely discussed in public. However, they were not well-known to everybody, and individual intellectual efforts were needed.

Even at the threshold of regaining Independence most curious occurrences demonstrated the severity and scope of censorship as well as the necessity for *the secret understanding of souls*. Let us take Geda's poetry collection *Mamutų tėvynė* (*The Homeland of Mammoths*) (1985) where Christian 'crosses' were replaced by 'mushrooms' following the censor's instructions. In Lithuanian phonetics these two words could be compared due to their similar sounding (*kryžius / grybas*), yet their meanings are completely different. The poet talked about this curious happening with annoyance and fun even later, approximately in 1990 (the year of Rebirth). In Geda's case, the censor was quite educated and tried to 'cure' Geda from Christianity with his own poetic remedy, namely, the chthonic myth of old Lithuanian culture which was not prohibited. Today, when we take a look at Soviet literature after 17 years of Independence, we must admit that, generally speaking, myth was the code of *the secret understanding of souls* in Soviet Lithuanian literature dictating the rules of communication. In

fact, the common code was needed allowing one to recognise what was *secret*. The chthonic myth of the earth and the underworld, according to the famous researcher of the old Baltic religion and mythology Norbertas Vėlius, was fundamental to the old matricentric, and difficult to reconstruct, worldview, which was realised through the repetitive semantics of earth, darkness, water, black colour and uncontrollable elements and forces of nature (Vėlius 1987: 45, 62–63). This semantics, forming quite original oppositions and links to the meanings of the sky, light, the sun and rainbow in Lithuanian literature, especially poetry, created a decisive dominant motif of the chthonic (wheat, rye, plough, grass-snake, bread), and they used to be easily recognised, like arbitrary codes, up to the restoration of Independence.

The accumulation of mythical entities in Soviet Lithuanian poetry is, in general, unique and could not be compared to anything else: there were no attempts to distance oneself from things that preserved (or even created and supported) mythical contents; they signalled the (authentic) meaning of conversations, even by using the ancient Greek and Vedic symbolism because the contents of Christian culture, which marked the development of an individualist, and not communal, consciousness, could not appear in any way. Among the most remarkable figures of Soviet literature whose work was dominated by these entities (contents) were Geda, Martinaitis, Janina Degutytė, Alfonsas Maldonis, Romualdas Granauskas and Juozas Aputis, next to Marcinkevičius who was especially popular in Soviet Lithuania due to his effort to restore the Lithuanian identity; in exile, Kazys Bradūnas was writing poetry of a similar kind. The uniqueness of Lithuanian exile literature lies in the fact that its concerns with the national tradition were not so strongly suspended either into the Aesopian language or into the secrecy of conversations, which would have had to be de-classified, de-coded. Thus, especially books by the first generation of exile poets who created the programme of the *Žemininkai* generation (Alfonsas Nyka-Niliūnas, Henrikas Nagys and Kazys Bradūnas) were emphasising Western culture, modern philosophy, which allowed an individual to come out, and the experience of modern art in general; the signs of the old Baltic mythology and religion were closely intertwined with the semantics of the Christian myth. In general, the literature and literary theory of Exodus (Rimvydas Šilbajoris, Violeta Kelertienė, Viktorija Skrupskelytė and Birutė Cipliauskaitė) is naturally more susceptible to individualist Christian issues; meanwhile Soviet literary theory, its most

powerful names (Vytautas Kubilius, Vanda Zaborskaitė and Kęstutis Nastopka), tried to protect individuality through the abundance of historiographic knowledge, expressive metaphoric words and a strong orientation towards a theoretical language independent of the dictatorship of censors. The theoretical school of contemporary Lithuanian literary theory, although significantly supported by the famous Lithuanians of Exodus, the Lithuanian-born French semiotician Algirdas Julius Greimas and cultural theorist Vytautas Kavolis, and less, but nevertheless, by Yuri Lotman's school of 'secondary modelling systems', tried to establish its position already before the restoration of Independence, and today has appropriated several schools, especially that of French semiotics.

Generally speaking, creation had become a certain *idée fixe* in Soviet Lithuanian culture, a Utopia, aimed at compensating for the situation of political persecution and captivity. Roughly speaking: "Let's create and we will be free!" This idea was developed by poets who made their debut in the 1950s and 1960s (Justinas Marcinkevičius, Marcelijus Martinaitis, Tomas Venclova, Vytautas P. Bložė, Geda). The generation younger by two decades who started their literary activities in the 1960s and 1970s and are now in their fifties, the most numerous in Lithuanian literature, was undoubtedly imbued by this idea and created very complex works dressed with philosophical and religious contents and complicated metaphors (Cieškaitė, Baliukonė, Patackas, Platelis, Kajokas and Miliauskaitė). Younger people, contemporary students, who are not familiar with the period have certain difficulties in understanding works by the above mentioned poets, since they seem to be hermetic and sophisticated, resembling puzzles or charades. Such sophistication was doubtlessly determined by the idea of *the secret understanding of souls*. There is a joke today that poets who made their debut in the 1980s and 1990s are linked by the fact that nothing unites them, except the desire to be different from others as such was the perception of individual freedom. Neutral, inoffensive to Soviet ideology, ancient myths were the primary material for their free creative activity as well as palimpsest (a concept developed by poet Platelis) that, in the course of time, was covered by new inscriptions in order to achieve an original meaning. Therefore, it is worth mentioning an important fact, which reinforced the role of ancient myth and classical philosophy in Soviet Lithuania: at the time when the best modern literature and art were prohibited, while new philosophical

works did not even reach the readers, volumes of *The Reader in the History of Philosophy* (without ideological comments) were published in Lithuanian in 1974–1987 by devoting most attention to the authors of Antiquity, Middle Ages, and Renaissance. Lithuanian poetry, interlaced with classical philosophical issues, incarnated the authentic discourse of philosophy and religion in Lithuanian culture until the Independence. For instance, today the ancient Greek myth no longer has such a role in Lithuanian literature; one rather returns to it like to some fundamental philosophical episteme. It is possible to understand the characters of ancient Greek myth in contemporary Lithuanian literature as well as easily traceable motifs only in the work of several authors who follow the neo-classicist tendency (Tomas Venclova, Kornelijus Platelis, Nijolė Miliauskaitė and Aidas Marčėnas). In other cases these motifs can be restored only as formations of quotations, palimpsests and intertexts; however, we would not find a very sophisticated and playful relationship between them. The ancient Greek myth has been, perhaps, too exploited, has become too easily recognisable due to its popularity during the Soviet period.

Due to a strange coincidence of circumstances, the folklore movement was extremely popular in Soviet Lithuania. On the one hand, it was people's creative activity, not prohibited by authorities; on the other hand, this movement was an indirect form of *the secret understanding of souls*, i.e., an opposition to official ideology. Starting from approximately the 1960s and 1970s, this movement gradually turned into an important intellectual incentive to think about the fundamental values of our own culture. The new school of myth researchers emerged in Lithuania (Norbertas Vėlius and Gintaras Beresnevičius) who had contacts with outstanding personalities in emigration (Algirdas Julius Greimas and Marija Gimbutas) and monitored similar works in foreign languages. Research in Lithuanian myth was jointly supported by outstanding Russian intellectuals Toporov, Ivanov, etc. who were globally recognised scientific figures opposing to the official Soviet policy. The publication of the journal *Balto-slavyanskye isledovanye* started in Moscow in 1981, and it was popular among Lithuanian students and intellectuals alike, as well as was Lotman's series *Trudy po znakovym sistemam* published in Tartu. Lithuanian poets (Marcinkevičius, Martinaitis, Geda, Platelis, Miliauskaitė and Vladas Braziūnas), just as Latvian poet Uldis Berzinš or Estonian poet Jaan Kaplinski, also participated in folklore and contributed to the mythological

research of their national cultural heritage by responding to historical, mythological and ethnographic works with their poetry, the mythical spirit of poems, and their stylised form including risky experimentation in linguistics. Some literary critics regard Lithuanian poets Geda, Martinaitis and Braziūnas as poets mythologists due to their particular intellectual and authentic relation to the Baltic myth as well as to the old Indo-European pro-language, the semantic imprints of which these authors tried to reconstruct intuitively or by referring to linguistics in their work: "everything is not here, not high, / not in the bullfinch's fly, / I am eternally grateful to her, / whom I saw after I died." (Braziūnas, "The Root"). It is difficult to define the features of this myth not only because the reconstruction of the old Baltic mythology and religion started quite late, but also because it is not yet fully known (apart from fragmentary information in the *Chronicle of John Malala* and the *Chronicle of Volyn*, *The Chronicle of Maciej Strykowski* and the *Prussian Chronicle of Simon Grunau*, the main source of information is folklore, especially archaic Latvian songs and Lithuanian mythological sagas; Beresnevičius 1997: 267). Today this tendency, diluted with new stylistic motifs and experimentation, has not completely disappeared from the field of Lithuanian poetry (younger poets Gytis Norvilas and Skaidrius Kandravičius), although it does not occupy such an important place, does not mark the horizons of national consciousness and continues the tradition of mythological research and linguistic experiment.

Perhaps, not a single better poet in Soviet Lithuania could evade this theoretical framework of myth; thus it could be regarded as a distinctive sign of this epoch, the dominant motif of the period. Among the parallels between the old Lithuanian myth and contemporary Lithuanian poetry, the intellectual friendship between Gimbutienė, a famous American mythologist who investigated gods and goddesses of matricentric Europe (1974), and poetess Pūkelevičiūtė from Canada (she wrote in Lithuanian) could be considered as rather interesting. In the context of this friendship, Pūkelevičiūtė published an excellent collection of poems, *Metūgės*, in 1952, which emanated the elemental and independent, erotic and constantly renewing power of natural world. According to the Spanish literary researcher Birutė Ciplijauskaitė (of Lithuanian origin; she wrote critiques on Lithuanian literature), if this book was published in English in 1952, it would have been regarded today as the initiator of feminism and considered in the

US as the main impulse to American feminism. However, Pūkelevičiūtė herself claimed that she had not had any feminist intentions; she only had wanted to reveal a sense of nature and world related to her land, her feminine sensibilities permeated by a reflection of nature. This collection received particularly hostile reactions when it appeared in the literature of Exodus because of a woman's unexpected openness, which was understood too straightforwardly as the author's biographical eroticism. However, it is in this parallel of the natural world and the erotic nature of woman that Pūkelevičiūtė has nurtured an idea unexpected to that moment in literature, an idea of a woman who was a part of nature: like trees sprouting their shoots every spring after winter (this image lies behind the title of the collection) a woman sprouts incessant life overcoming death through all manifestations of her existence: "My bride – my death: / Your neck like a stretched bow. / and in your lips the acerbity of forest raspberries. / I return to your untouched womb. / And again I am not conceived." (Pūkelevičiūtė, "War Tales"). Woman's life circles constantly around her passion to love, to be, to be reborn by creating the triumph of a passionate desire for life: "Tombs tear in half. The Earth – a young mad- / woman stumbles under the sweet burden. / We are only vineyards. Full of humi- / lity. / And spite." (Pūkelevičiūtė, "The Blade"). We would not find such conceptual programmes of femininity, so strongly linked to the Goddess Mother of the Old Europe or to the recreated image of the Christian Mother of God and opposed to the traditional cannon, in Soviet Lithuanian literature.

A personification of Mother the Earth and of all its powers could be found in poetry written by men during the Soviet period and in Exodus literature of the same time, such as Marcinkevičius, Alfonsas Maldonis, Bradūnas and Nyka-Niliūnas. Yet these occurrences do not transgress the level of the established cultural stereotypes. Nevertheless, in Exodus, this Mother was more challenged by cultural reflections; she acquired richer meanings related to the contents of modern art, existentialist philosophy important at the time and Christian culture. An American researcher of Lithuanian culture in the context of comparative culture studies, who also analysed the development of Lithuanian mentality, focused on the pagan motif that became fixed in Soviet literature as an attempt to secularise, "bring down to earth", certain active Christian symbols, instead of rehabilitating and developing them as it happened in Exodus literature (Kavolis 1994: 247–251). The Earth

is a mother that embodies the easily recognisable and uncomplicated world of the continuity of nature. In Exodus literature this image of Mother was preserved until around the turn of the 1960s–1970s, yet in later exile of the 1960s and 1970s, the theme of God was brought to the foreground, for instance, by Algimantas Mackus (ib. 241–247). Meanwhile, in Soviet literature of the 1960s–1970s, poetry of those who developed during Khrushchev's 'thaw' period was more oriented towards Western Europe and modernism or the Orient as a possibility of an active spiritual life in which the theme of pagan beliefs was overshadowed by a range of new ones; yet the dominating stereotype images of femininity and masculinity remained unchallenged, according to Kavolis, signalling a lack of the development of consciousness: among more interesting cases of newer Lithuanian poetry, Kavolis singled out Gražina Cieškaitė who touched upon a particularly old principle of femininity in her work, "the sister of hell", older than all mythical and religious forms of women's culture (ib. 145). This "sister of hell" is like an eruption of chaos; and she alone gives birth to a homeless God, who does not belong to any mythology, without the help of any masculine element (ib.). Since even poetry written by women during the Soviet period, for instance, Janina Degutytė and Judita Vaičiūnaitė, was dominated by a particularly stereotypical interpretation of ancient Greek and Baltic myths, we can consider such an independent manifestation of Gražina Cieškaitė's femininity as an impressive phenomenon; however, it took a long time to bring it to a conscious resolution as compared to the whole process – approximately up to the "Towers" of Onė Baliukonė (1996) where she tried to adapt the contents and images of the Mother Goddess of Old Europe to Christian mythology. In the context of these images, an unusual duo of *the Mother of God and Daughter* emerges while testing the canon of *the God Father and Son*. This Mother of God and Daughter brought up by modern poetry is a kind of opposition to the system of images developed by *the secret understanding of souls*, which took place already in the Independent Lithuania. Besides, a new edition of *Metūgės* by Pūkelevičiūtė published at the time was sold out. Thus, the phenomenon of the Aesopian language and *the secret understanding of souls* should be regarded as a programme of preservation of the traditional Lithuanian culture and even its hermetisation.

The theoretical perception of myth gave an impulse to take further steps in the 1970s and 1980s. Due to the coincidence of circumstances

during the Soviet period, one looked mostly towards the East: to Buddhism (Bložė, Cieškaitė and Marčėnas) and refined Zen (Donaldas Kajokas); in order to reveal a Lithuanian predisposition to meditation, to Vedas (Platelis and Miliauskaitė); when disclosing the nature of the Baltic attitude, to Egyptian mysticism and esoteric literature (Leonardas Gutauskas, Vaičiūnaitė and Baliukonė). However, the present generation of poets in their fifties have created the most interesting interpretation of the myth that not only embodied the allegorical character of the Soviet Aesopian language, but also formed an entire algorithm of *the secret understanding of souls*: Gintaras Patackas, Antanas A. Jonynas, Platelis, Kajokas, Miliauskaitė, Onė Baliukonė, Cieškaitė, Braziūnas and others. By using ancient Greek motifs and images, also the sensitivity to the etymology and semantics of Lithuanian language, educated by theoretical research into Baltic myths, language games and experiments of modernist art, these authors have created a school of personal myth unheard of in Lithuanian poetry until now. In the books by these authors, complex reflections on the most important attributes of human existence, metaphysical existence, the system of values and reality as well as illusions of consciousness turned into authentically discussed fundamental issues of philosophy and religion. The most important characteristic of this generation's worldview is a search for landmarks of values in the dreary conditions of stagnation, which reinforces the idea of a creative act as a space of freedom, and the analysis of the essential categories of existence. What was prohibited and impossible in a direct discourse during the Soviet period became possible only with the help of *the secret understanding of souls*. Literature, in a way, embodied this space of conversations; thus, it is interesting to note the authors' activity and selfless work for literature (not only for the authentic part of it, but also for comments, essays and translations) and also support to each other in the form of non-official communication and co-operation. Although they had not formed any official art movements (this was impossible during the Soviet period), these artists constantly supported each other unofficially: by organising poetry evenings and book presentations, reviewing each other's work or simply expressing positive feelings over a new publication. In the official artistic scene their communication was restricted to the algorithm of *the secret understanding of souls*: a recognisable system of values, the worldview and a stylistic system.

The worldview of this generation was formed by a system of cognition extrapolated from ancient Greek and Baltic myths and theoretical myths in general. The priority of reality and form taken from the Greek myth and the harmonious relationship with nature turning into a cosmos-feeling (it was a concept also created by Geda in an attempt to explain the holistic sense of the feeling of nature in Lithuanian consciousness) taken from the Baltic myth turned into the priority of image in the work of these authors (*vers libre*, a poem-narrative, the plot) against the euphoric structure of poetry. On the basis of this algorithm, up to the restoration of Independence, and also after it (because the authors' worldview does not change according to ideological commissions), a kind of poetry formed that discussed the core issues of existence through a mythical worldview, images and subjects, topos and motifs. Information gained during complex studies in modern literature and philosophy as well as special oriental studies lies at the foundations of ancient Greek and Baltic myths and creates unexpected forms of thought and poetry as well as helps to interpret the Christian stories of guilt and sin, fallen angels or the word of Christ (Cieškaite and Baliukonė). Or simply it analyses the interaction between ancient Greek myths and modern culture in the world of imagination of contemporary humans (Patackas and Jonynas). Or, against the background of the Baltic worldview, it tries to reveal the cosmic genesis of Vedas, the constant circular movement of man and natural world (Platelis). Or the general dimension of the world is revealed through parallels of ancient Greek and Baltic myths, which, in its mysterious nature, is open to many religious systems (Miliauskaitė). Or experiences of Japanese Zen are revealed in the context of Baltic and Christian myths, topos and motifs (salvation, guilt and forgiveness), simply conveying the visible, palpable, material beauty of the world permeated with higher reality (Kajokas). The allegorical principle of Aesopian language is formed from recognisable signs of the worldview and composition of style and from constant indirect allegorical hints. In this sense, it is possible to claim that myth in Soviet literature, especially poetry, became not only a form of political conspiracy, not only a thickened way of communication between the writer and the reader (today this poetry is the most intellectual, thus, the least read), but also a form of compensating for allegory or direct analogy, which is a weakness of art. In other words, through myth Lithuanian poetry has essentially been using an additional system of signs, in which it is

possible to see not only the outlines of communication, but additional political meanings.

In Soviet Lithuanian literature, due to ideological conspiracy, myth bridged the obligatory areas of pseudo-realism and censorship and the specific space of art. This space was dominated by an effort to return to the parameters of art and the truth of life, the very metaphorical possibility of speaking. In this sense, while Aesopian language suggested only a strategic principle of communication, myth was already the basis of meanings, a pool from which it was possible to draw unpredictable, non-contracting metaphorical meanings. The goal of Lithuanian Soviet Aesopian language or *the secret understanding of souls* was freedom, the truth and a possibility to experience the harmony of existence emerging at the point where these two values intersected. And it is interesting to see here that the desired harmony of existence becomes one of the most remarkable features of contemporary Lithuanian writers, especially poets, who are in their fifties. At the foundation of this desired harmony we could see the fundamental characteristics of classicism: respect to the material, objectively perceived, world and a belief in the possibility to see the traces of divine creation in material structures. Considering that during the Soviet times such intentions could not be advertised, this was already a unique step of literature to a higher consciousness, not mentioning the fact that this was also a detour from the too much exploited tradition of romanticism. The landmarks of this Lithuanian classicism are even deeper, related to the ancient Greek foundations of contemporary consciousness and recognition of individualism, the harmony of body and soul, the primacy of the material world that was born in the Renaissance epoch. In the work of such poets as Miliauskaitė, Kajokas and Platelis and writers Antanas Ramonas, Vanda Juknaite and Bitė Vilimaite, it is possible to recognise efforts (1) to convey an aesthetic significance to classical humanist values and to revalue and interpret them (the oriental theme, ancient Greek myths); (2) to seek universal contents and a universal long-lasting form (the classical form of versification); (3) to disassociate from experiments imposed by contemporary mass culture, including postmodernism; (4) equally, to free themselves from the inherited customs and habits of Lithuanian literature; (5) to speak in an original, authentic form, however not in egocentric or extremely subjective ways.

It should be emphasised that philosophical and religious systems found in the works of these authors are not merely a light play; they testify to their efforts to perceive human essence, find cultural analogies and recognise the principles of spiritual experience, metaphysical thinking and mystical experiences. Their readers were also interested in this. Thus literature in Soviet Lithuania became a certain place for correspondence where readers trained to *the secret understanding of souls* used to recognise quickly what had been hidden or untold, or what had been told by only giving hints. Not accidentally J. Erlickas, a classic of Lithuanian humour, in his book of critiques *Viršūnės ir kelnės* (1995) (*Tops and Pants*) mentioned that Aesopian language in Lithuanian literature trained readers to recognise hidden meanings not only between the lines, but also without any lines (Erlickas 1995: 9). As a certain response to this joke of Erlickas, an original idea was suggested by the youngest generation of Lithuanian poets (Tomas S. Butkus, the author of the art project *Vario burnos* (*Copper Mouths*) to publish a book in blank pages, and everyone was to unveil what they wished. The idea itself signals a new literary consciousness and forms of existence. Under the conditions of real freedom, art requires different rules of communication, and it would cease to exist as such without the possibility of *the secret understanding of souls*.

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The Affirmation of Modernity through the Classical Myth in Slovenian Poetry after the Second World War

VID SNOJ

No-one knows exactly when the myth originated. It came into Greek literature from prehistoric times, transmitting itself through oral tradition.

A later distinction reminds us that *mýthos* is a narrating, or, more precisely, a story narrating speech in verse, the speech of poets from time immemorial, in opposition to which *lógos*, a written speech in prose, came to establish itself in antiquity, particularly in its discursive, argumentative form assumed in the writings of philosophers.

Therefore, the classical myth is, paradoxically, a myth *ante litteram* that existed even before antiquity came into being as an era of the historical existence of Greeks and Romans. It is a speech, a story of gods and men from prehistory that stood at the beginning of Greek literature and – this we do know – became its core. This story permeated Greek epic, lyric and tragic poetry, and in this poetry attained its classical form. Since then, the stories of Odysseus, Prometheus, Oedipus, Antigone, and so on, have been circulating and are being interpreted in European literature.

And so on – at this point, I shall take the liberty of skipping the classical forms of myth and their destiny in European literature, by which we usually understand (and, under its name, deal with) the literatures of big European nations, and jump into a relatively late period and, particularly, into a less known landscape of this literature. This will by all means be a jump, but on the track of the classical myth: my thesis is that, precisely through this myth, modernity was introduced or, better, reintroduced, and thus definitely affirmed, in Slovenian lyric

poetry after the Second World War. How was this possible? How was it possible for something as old as the classical myth to become a harbinger of modernity?

Let me first attend to some historical and literary-historical circumstances that are more or less known and accepted in the Slovenian consciousness.

Inter arma silent Musae. During the war, the silence of the Muse prevailed in Slovenian poetry. This did not mean, however, that all of verse-making had been brought to silence, but there was only a lack of poetically relevant poetry. With the exception of a few poems, which were not published in that time and could only be registered by literary historiography in a later period, Slovenian poetry returned to its old function of national defense. This phenomenon is, of course, also well-known in other literatures, namely, when arms begin to sing, poetry becomes a defense weapon. But in Slovenian literature – a literature of a small nation which, given its hard and uneasy historical existence, needed poetry for self-preservation – national defense is an old hypothecation. At the beginning of the war, the elderly Oton Župančič, the most respected Slovenian poet at the time, addressed to himself and to his fellow-poets the following words in the form of a question, which simultaneously has the sense and power of an imperative: “Do you know, oh poet, your debt?” – and called for the “song for present-day use.”¹ Under his aegis, poets returned to the most elementary poetical tradition – a confession of patriotism in a rhythmical and sonorous form. The exhortation of a nation in danger was voiced in each and every plainly intoned verse, so to speak, even in the lamentation over the dead.

The Second World War was also a time of the communist revolution in Slovenia. The scenario is well-known: after the victory of the revolution, poetry was put in the service of building socialism. A mobilizing optimism was demanded, and thus, as elsewhere in Eastern Europe, the so-called “builder” or “pickaxeman poetry” (more known as *proizvodstvennaia poeziia* in Russia) was produced.

Changes appeared rather quickly after the Yugoslav communist party's break with the Informbiro in 1948 and the beginning of

¹ Cf. the poems *Veš, poet, svoj dolg?* (*Do You Know, Oh Poet, Your Debt?*) in *Pojte za menoj* (*Sing after Me*), both of which were published on 6th September 1941 in the newspaper *Slovenski poročevalec*.

“socialist democratization” around 1950, when the brutal dictates of the communist party – that is, Stalinism – in the field of culture and art came to an end, and more indirect and refined forms of directing and controlling them were introduced. In an atmosphere of allowing whatever did not directly endanger the communist party’s monopoly of power to develop in culture, a generation of poets appeared on the scene in Slovenia, together with some older, pre-war poets, who turned away from socially engaged writing. This turning away became declarative in their collective book of poems entitled *Poems of the Four* (1953), in which each of the four young poets began his section of poems with a statement of principles about poetry. This was a novelty in the cultural-political sense at the most, but their turning away from the social *engagement* to “intimism” and “primary lyrism,” as this was labelled by literary critics and historiographers, brought nothing new in the poetical sense: a return to the elementary confession, restoration of the quasi-romantic split between the beautiful soul and ugly reality ... It had nothing to do with modernity.

What is, in fact, the situation with respect to modernity? How does it appear?

Modernity affirms itself, and is perhaps characterized by a special manner of affirmation – *the imposition*. When Paul Valéry speaks of the appearance of modernity in Baudelaire, whom Hugo Friedrich in his still referential book *Die Struktur der modernen Lyrik* (1956) enthroned as the first modern poet, he uses a verb that is meaningful in this respect, the verb *imposer* (cf. Valéry 1957: 598). Modernity *s’impose*, says Valéry, it imposes itself with force, if I may deduce further – but it is not necessary, though perhaps expected in poetry, for modernity to impose itself in such linguistic experimentation, where we cannot help but see force being exerted on language. We are reminded that modernity is not necessarily a deconstructive or destructive experiment with language in Baudelaire’s traditional binding of the poetical word, the preserved strophic form and the alexandrine, in which all innovations are made. Modernity imposes itself – and in a more relevant way – still elsewhere. The imposition of modernity particularly implies a certain positioning, a certain positing, which is certainly not without force. Modernity *posits itself*, yet it does so in the double *in*: in breaking with what was before and simultaneously in its own self-affirmation. What was just now a groping private intuition, establishes itself as a new universal truth.

But how does modernity impose itself in Slovenian poetry? Let me answer this question by a detour.

In the eighties of the previous century, two anthologies were published in Slovenia, one after the other: in 1983 *Slovene Lyric Poetry 1950–1980*, and a year later *Contemporary Slovene Poetry*. The first was compiled by Janko Kos, the most distinguished living Slovene comparatist, also author of the important *Comparative History of Slovene Literature* (1987), and the second by Tine Hribar, the most outstanding Slovene philosopher of the phenomenological direction. Both anthologies open with the poems of Božo Vodušek (1905–1978). Or, to put it differently: in both of them Vodušek appears as the beginner of modern poetry in Slovenia after the Second World War, though he published only eight poems that passed by unnoticed at the time of their publication. The reason for placing Vodušek at the beginning in order to amend the former neglect is fittingly rendered in particular by Hribar's reference to Vodušek's pre-war poem, *Izpoved* (*Confession*), from 1931. In this poem, as Hribar says in his commentary to the selection, the horizon of Vodušek's pre-war poetry is most evidently spread as "the horizon of the world without God" (Hribar 1984: 175), thereby preparing his post-war poetry.

The poem *Confession* (Vodušek 1980: 103) presents itself as a distinctively modern lyric confession. It gives an account of the spiritual experience of God's absence, which, for example, is no longer a psalmist's experience of the veiling of God's face, nor a mystic's experience of a "dark night," but, in the modern inversion of traditional spirituality, becomes nothing less than a universal, world-wide fact. The bearer of the confession is not "I;" the confession is universalized through a "collective subject" – "we." The words "to reach the impossible" are repeated four times in the poem, expressing the passion of this "we," our passion, as an attempt to reach God or as an assault on Him. This is followed, in the closing strophe of two verses, by the words:

– Suddenly ceased to shine
the sun and the stars and all the lights of the world.

Here, we must pay attention to the dash. The fine syntax of this punctuation mark ties the absence of God to the sudden darkening of the whole world and, at the same time, abruptly breaks with the topography of traditional spirituality: the modern inversion transforms,

through the introduction of the collective “we,” the feeling of the temporal individual loss into the universal loss of God within the world.

The darkening of the world in this poem eloquently announces the collection of poems entitled *Odčarani svet* (*The Disenchanted World*) from 1939, in which Vodušek, a translator and principal promoter of Baudelaire in pre-war Slovenian poetry, develops, in different figures, the persistent and tormenting Baudelairian examination of the heart in a world without God. In a handful of his post-war poems, however, the classical myth appears – and, along with it, modernity once again.

But how can modernity possibly impose itself through the classical myth? Let us remember: in his famous writing *Vom neueren Gebrauch der Mythologie*, Herder calls attention to the fact that Greek mythology, which knew not the theological rigour and dogmatic authority of Christianity, was already at the disposal of ancient poets for being used by them freely, and recommends precisely such a use – the use that incorporates contemporary subjects in myth – also to the poets of his time (cf. Herder 1967). Friedrich, on the other hand, in the previously mentioned book does not speak of mythology, but of that poetical disposition, that bearing of modernity, into which, if we think well, the classical myth can nevertheless fit nicely, too – of depersonalization. He says: “It is with Baudelaire that depersonalization of modern lyric begins, at least in the sense in which the lyric word no longer derives from the unity of poetry and the empirical person” (Friedrich 1956: 26). The intentional impersonality gives rise to the different figures, in which the traditional covenant between the “empirical person” of the poet and the speaker of the poem breaks up, that is, the continuity that establishes the lyric speech as an immediate confession of the poet himself. Such a figure may be an invented character from contemporaneity, for example Prufrock or Sweeney in Eliot, perhaps the most loud-voiced advocate of depersonalization in poetry, or it can also come from the classical myth, as numerous examples have shown since Baudelaire. Modernity only incises *the caesura* in the mythic figure through which this figure becomes a cipher of modern existence.

The modern mythopoesis thus appropriates the figures of classical myth by making them *per-sonae*, “masks,” through which manifold voices of the searched-for new identity pass. Precisely this can also be found in Vodušek’s reintroduction of modernity in Slovenian poetry through the classical myth, and that is why he is, with his Odysseus and Prometheus, my first choice.

My second choice is Gregor Strniša (1930–1987), a reader of Vodušek's pre-war as well as post-war poems, when these still were without an echo in literary critique and literary historiography. This choice, however, is again not merely a "subjective" one: Janko Kos, for example, regards the figure of Minotaur in Strniša's poetry, which, like Vodušek's, measures the "horizon of the world without God," as "the most consistent poetization of metaphysical nihilism in Slovenian poetry" (Kos 2003: 163).

Besides their modern use of classical myth, Vodušek and Strniša, who started to publish his poems in the fifties of the previous century and belongs to the second generation of Slovenian post-war poets, share an abstinence from ruthless experimenting with language: from the abolition of a strophe, the loosening of verse, the dissolution of syntax, the emancipation of a word. Vodušek wrote all but one of his post-war poems in four-verse strophes with rhyme, while Strniša developed a peculiar cyclical poem composed of five songs, each having three four-verse strophes with assonance, already in *Odysseus*, his second collection of poems.

On the other hand, both poets were linked, in literary critique as well as in literary historiography, with existentialism. Time and again their poetry was labeled "existential" or, even more determinately, "existentialist." But I myself would not like to get involved in the discussion about what existentialism is in literature, when it appeared in Slovenian literature and when in poetry – if, as opposed to narration and drama, existentialism exists in poetry at all. Perhaps in literature it is nothing but a sort of "ideology," a set of themes that is not neutral, and this not only because it is based on choice (and presupposes an "interested consciousness"), but because it implicates an angle of inclination from which the chosen themes are observed.

It therefore seems by all means more proper to speak of modernity than of existentialism with respect to Vodušek's and Strniša's poetry. Let me now cite from their poetry a few examples concerning the imposition of modernity through the classical myth, and accompany them with brief remarks.

Vodušek published the poem *Odisejski motiv* (*An Odyssean Motive*) as the last of his eight post-war poems (Vodušek: 1980: 134–135).² Its title already points to a certain distance. In literary and art criticism, the

² For the first publication, see *Nova sodobnost* (1956), n. 4, pp. 299–300.

term “motive” signifies a constant in terms of content that repeats itself in a set of works, and also refers to a repetition in the title of Vodušek’s poem, namely, the repetition of Odysseus’ voyage. Yet a difference is already inscribed in this repetition, a deviation suggested by the word “Odyssean,” for “Odyssean” does not simply mean “of Odysseus”, but “such as of Odysseus,” “Odysseus-like.”

Vodušek’s Odyssean voyager is not like Homer’s Odysseus at all. Vodušek does not present him as someone returning home, to Ithaca, but as someone going into the unknown. In fact, Vodušek thus remains on the track of Dante, who, as W. B. Stanford says, radically converted the figure of home-seeking Odysseus in European literature, having allowed him to sail past Heracles’ pillars beyond the borders of the known world: “In place of this [Homer’s] centripetal, homeward-bound figure Dante substituted a personification of centrifugal force” (Stanford 1992: 181). Vodušek’s newcomer is also a centrifugal figure, a fugitive indeed: his voyage is a flight, a “Robinsonian flight” (v. 3) away from *oikumené*, an “inhabited world,” into the refuge of a wild, lonely island. Vodušek, however, adds to the Danteian tradition of Odysseus a relevant trait of modernity, that modernity which has nothing to do with the projections of the absolute novelty fostered by artistic avant-gardes and social revolutions of the 20th century. The newcomer to the uninhabited island is not the new man establishing a new world – the one who should have been born from the death of the old man and whom avantgardists and revolutionaries dreamt in their dreams of immortality – but is, if I contextualize this reading with other poems by Vodušek, a *present-day, yet hardened man*, who, after going through the fire of passion in a world without God, salutes the “new earth” (v. 16), the new “brave world” (v. 33). The penultimate strophe speaks to this world, and at the same time describes the position of the newcomer within it, as follows:

Through your bravery set free
from doubts and questionings,
he will praise the mystery of life
and without expectations wait.

A year before *An Odyssean Motive*, Vodušek published the poem *Ko smo Prometeji neugnani* (*When we mischievous Prometheus*)

(Vodušek 1980: 129–130).³ Let us remember: according to Hesiod, Prometheus stole fire from the gods for man; according to Aeschylus, Prometheus taught man different arts through which he, in his animal-like existence, was humanized; according to Ovidius, Prometheus even created man from soil and water after the divine image – and in the tradition of the modern age, in Shaftesbury and Goethe, he became a “second creator” after the Creator. In Vodušek, however, the mythic figure already multiplies in the title: we are all Prometheuses. The poem begins as follows:

When we mischievous Prometheuses
stole for ourselves the red fire from heaven,
now we are ourselves from it ignited,
flames burn in us blazing.

I am reading contextually again: we all, all modern people, are Prometheuses *in the horizon of a godless world*. The stealing of fire from heaven that we all have committed goes hand in hand with the loss of God within the world.

Here I would like to point out that, in this poem, the “fire” appears as a poetical word which cannot be interpreted unambiguously, or translated into discursive language with only a single word. By all means, it is no cold means of cultivation, but that which, on one side, ignites us in our innermost inwardness – passion, our innermost passion, our lust for life. On the other side, it is that which “enlightens” us, that in which we are looking outwards, as is paradoxically evident from the following two lines:

From the ground up to the starry vault
the whole world glitters to us in the conflagration...

There is fire everywhere, even “in greenery lava decants itself” (v. 11), yet the fire that we see around us is the same fire in which we are looking outwards from ourselves: “one fire, one sole / lust untamed” (v. 19–20). The worldwide conflagration comes out of us. The world of our lust for life that was God’s property is a world set on fire, our

³ For the first publication, see *Nova Sodobnost* (1955), n. 10, pp. 880–881.

Promethean creation. And in this fire, as the final lines of the poem suggest, we are self-consummated.

I shall now pass to my second choice, Strniša, first to his cyclic poem of five songs entitled *Odysseus*, which was written a few years after Vodušek's last published poem, *An Odyssean Motive*, and concludes Strniša's second collection of poems with the same title, *Odysseus* (Strniša 1963: 81–87).⁴

In contrast to Vodušek's Odyssean voyager, Strniša's Odysseus has already come, he is already on the island. Strniša introduces his poem with a citation from Homer, which, in a translation by Anton Sovrè, the first integral translation of *Odyssey* into Slovene dating from 1951 and the only one made until now, sounds like this: "just once more I would like to see the smoke over my native Ithaca." In Homer's epic, Odysseus endures his days sitting on the shore of the island of the nymph Calypso, and his yearning for home can neither be overcome by enjoyment of the nymph's divine love, nor by her promise of immortality. In Strniša's poem, on the contrary, he is sitting on the shore of a completely lonely, uninhabited island.

So far so good. I would like, however, to point out a hardly noticeable *interruption* in the complicated intertextuality of the old and the new poem transmitted through the translation. In his translation of Homer cited by Strniša, Sovrè actually adds "over my native Ithaca" to Homer's "smoke ascending" (*kapnós apothrôskon*, *Od.* 1, 58). This is certainly a suitable translational *Zudichtung*, but becomes completely lost in Strniša's poem itself, in its text. This is because Ithaca is not mentioned even once in this poem, nor is there a single word about Odysseus' yearning for it.

The citation placed at the beginning of a work often strikes the basic tone by which the text is then imbued, but in Strniša's poem, the yearning tone of the introductory citation is somehow suspended before entering the text. Instead of going, in his yearning, towards that which is (perhaps) going to come, Strniša's Odysseus looks towards the past and death. In the second song, he remembers his voyage to the dwelling place of the dead, and in the third, the island of the Sirens as well; the sole path that he undertakes, without actually being able to go anywhere, is the path of remembrance. Sitting on the beach, he is captured, with the earthly weight of his being, "between the land of

⁴ For the first publication, see *Perspektive* (1962/63), n. 25, pp. 494–495.

shells and the land of birds" (the fifth song, v. 6). The earth on which he is, is compressed between water and air, between the water of mute shells and the air of singing birds, so that the "up" and the "down", the height of the air and the depth of the sea, become a "behind" and a "front" in the symbolical configuration of the poem (v. 2–4):

Behind him there are restless flocks of motley birds,
and in the waves in front of him a black rock lies
covered from heavy shells of fold-like shapes.

In this configuration, it is the sea and time that move, in contrast to the sitting Odysseus, compressed, so to say, from all sides. In the first song, particularly the movement of the sea is stressed by repetition in slight variations ("the sea rises and falls"), and so is the movement of time in the fifth song ("spring comes and goes"). Each time, the pair of verbs speeds up the movement of the sea and time in the poem compared to their movement in nature, yet this movement is never moving on anywhere, but coming back again and again. Surrounded by such a movement, the oppressive static of Odysseus' figure can only sink.

Allow me to finish with Strniša's earlier poem, *Inferno*, which is composed of two cycles of five songs and placed in the middle of the *Odysseus* collection of poems (Strniša 1963: 44–55).⁵ This two-cyclic poem is a poem about death. The title of the first cycle is *Pustinja (The Wilderness)*, and the title of the second *Gora (The Mountain)*, and they both speak of the journey of an unnamed someone traveling days and days across the wilderness to the mountain and still further into it.

In archaic cultures, the mountain is the ultimate place of earth where, in the eyes of a mythical man, earth touches heaven: a dwelling place of gods, a place of cult, and, as a bond between earth and heaven, a place of ascent into heaven. In Strniša's modern mythopoesis it is also the ultimate earthly place, but one which does open for descent into the earthly depths rather than for ascent into celestial heights: "with peaks that are as curved as the horns of a bull" (the fifth song, v. 6), it has the outward look of a "bull's skull" (the sixth poem, v. 11) and, at the same time, the internal structure of a labyrinth which, with its descending pits, is reminiscent of Dante's hell, and has Minotaur at its deepest centre.

⁵ For the first publication, see *Perspektive* (1961/62), n. 17, pp. 769–772.

At the entrance into the mountain, the unnamed someone begins to be designated by the pronoun "who." The unnamed multiplies, but this time the multitude is few in number; hardly anyone who managed to make the tiresome journey across the wilderness and enter the mountain belongs to it. But only he who does not go astray in the blind corridors of the mountain and does not "become lost in hallucinations" (the eighth poem, v. 7), only he who "comes to the hollow heart of the labyrinth" (the ninth poem, v. 6) and goes further, still further into the cave of this heart, still further through it – only he will then truly hear something, in the distance he will hear something like the grinding of a horn. But when he is supposed to see something, *he does not see anything*. The only thing that looks and sees is the eye of Minotaur: "the eye that catches sight of you, and you do not see it" (the tenth poem, v. 8). The last strophe says:

Hardly anyone comes to these places.
But nobody returned out of the mountain yet.
Some die in the labyrinth of thirst and hunger,
with horns Minotaur impales the others.

Not only the majority of men who, living from day to day, are unknowingly falling victim to death, but even the few who are fighting, even he who fights it out and is about to confront death, ultimately does not see it. In the metaphor of Minotaur's eye that sees without being seen, Strniša presents the impossibility of confronting death and, there being no duel without confrontation, without staring from eye to eye, *the impossibility of overcoming death*.

Modernity does not dazzle itself with its novelty: a man does not have an eye for confronting death.

Precisely for this reason, Strniša's modern appropriation of the myth of Minotaur is perhaps, to repeat the previously cited judgement, "the most consistent poetization of metaphysical nihilism in Slovenian poetry."

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The “American Dream” and Its Interpretation in American Nonfiction

ZHANNA KONOVALOVA

Perhaps like all dreams, the American dream is open to more interpretations than there are interpreters... (Hochschild 1995: 250)

The above quotation introduces one of the most important notions of the American history, reality and mythology – the American dream. This paper proposes to analyze one of the variants of its interpretation and to observe how the American dream is reflected in American nonfiction of the second half of the twentieth century. By “nonfiction” I do not mean the whole layer of nonfiction such as essays, travelogues, theoretical and scientific works. This essay will focus on the special area of nonfiction – the so-called literary nonfiction. The term is rather controversial and so is the phenomenon. Actually it is not the only term applied. New Journalism, artistic nonfiction, nonfiction novel, non-fiction story and new reportage are a few of the names used to describe it. But defining it so differently all the scholars agree in emphasizing its most essential characteristic – such writings present the immediate reaction of the writer to the events which the author took part in, influential ideas and beliefs of the time. Thus, being the most important part of American history, culture, social and political life and American mentality as well the American dream occupies the most significant place in this type of American nonfiction. It is difficult to deny that the notion of the American dream is one of the most discussed ones in American science and reality. It is believed to have an enormous influence on American history, economics, politics and literature as well.

The dream is defined as a notion, concept, phenomenon, national idea. But most scholars agree that the best term applied to the dream is "myth" which is not understood as a part of ancient consciousness or folklore, but rather as "popular belief or tradition that has grown up around something or someone, especially one embodying the ideals and institutions of a society or segment of society"¹.

The question of its origin is complicated likewise. Some scholars tend to name 1607 when the first settlers appeared on the American shore. Others are inclined to think that the American dream came to life when the colonies acquired the independence that is not devoid of substance as appropriation of Independence signified the formation of American society. But the majority of scientists consider that the American dream had existed long before the continent was discovered. To be sure, Christopher Columbus sought to find a passage to India, and his backers were essentially interested in the riches of the East; still, Columbus imagined that a new kingdom of God, a terrestrial paradise, might be established in the land to which his navigational mistake had led him (Fossum, Roth 1981: 4). In "Ideologies and Utopias. The Impact of the New Deal on American Thought" Arthur Ekirch writes that centuries before the birth of the United States, the special deity of the Aztec Indians was a bearded god of white skin who had promised to return and was still awaited. From this primitive hope can be dated, perhaps, the remote antecedents of the American dream, and from 1492, when Columbus and his three tiny ships were sighted off the coast of North America, its first dim realization (Ekirch 1971:3). Such views are evidently of some interest especially for understanding the American approach towards the history and philosophical concepts having originated in America. The fact that the USA is one of the youngest countries marked its imprint on its perception of world and national history. Naturally many American politicians and historians tried to find deeper roots. The dream in this context testified earlier existence of the nation and state.

For the most part scholars agree in presuming that the American dream is a specifically national phenomenon, though an alternative point of view exists. In the course of American history numerous attempts to present the dream as a universal phenomenon were made.

¹ The definition is taken from Merriam-Webster Dictionary of the English Language / Internet resource <http://webster-html.narod.ru>

The American dream is sometimes believed to be the realization of the myth of Atlantis, the concept of philosophic Republic of Plato, the myth of a timeless perfection in Utopia or Heaven and the idea of the Old Christian City of God. Thus, Frederic Carpenter states that the American dream praises not nationalism, but freedom for all men; not materialism, but the progress of science; not the compulsory reform of society, but the education of the individual; and not mere success, but self-realization through struggle and even tragedy. Although it is "American" in a sense, it existed before America was discovered – indeed, it helped to discover America. And because it is not merely national, it is likely to persist even though American civilization, as we know it, should pass away (Carpenter 1955: 198). The quoted above tendency of dream globalization is easy to explain as the whole American history is characterized by the attempts to provide theoretical proof of America being unique and chosen.

The question presenting the greatest difficulty in the course of studies is the definition of the myth of the American dream. There are several approaches to its definition. Some of the scholars tend to present the dream as a definite concept, namely the concept of success (Hochschild 1995), hope for the better future (Vernon 1974), the American way of life (Trilling 1970). Obviously all these concepts can be included in the American dream, although none of them can claim exclusive status. Other researchers believe that defining the dream as an entity is impossible since there is no such entity as the American dream. Instead, there are many American Dreams, their appeal simultaneously resting on their variety and their specificity (Cullen 2003: 7). For the "Dream" is in fact many dreams, woven together like an intricate fabric – an immensely complicated set of social and moral ideals that often conflict (Barker, Sabin 1995: 9). Though such fragmentation may lead to deprivation of integrity of the myth and thus diminish its importance. Therefore the most logical, we consider, is to interpret the dream as a synthesis of various conceptions namely those of success, upward mobility, frontier, self-made man, the City Upon a Hill, the New World, national redemption, God-given mission, etc. All these components penetrated into the myth at different times and Americans must have faith in each component of the dream for the whole dream to bear the vast emotional and political weight that it now carries (Hochschild 1995: 257).

In general being a very complicated phenomenon, the American dream preserves paramount political, economical, social and cultural significance and arouses the interest both of scholars and writers. Moreover the whole American literature is considered to be its reflection. Many critics even consider that American literature has differed from the English one because of the constant and omnipresent influence of the American dream upon it (Carpenter 1955: 3). In *The American Jeremiad* Sacvan Bercovitch writes that all classic writers (to varying degrees) labored against the myth as well as within it. All of them felt, privately at least, as oppressed by Americanism as liberated by it. And all of them, however captivated by the national dream, also used the dream to reach beyond the categories of their culture (Bercovitch 1978: 179). The above quotation shows the global meaning of the dream for American literature. In this essay I will focus on the creativity of one of the vivid representatives of American literature of the twentieth century Norman Mailer who proves to be one of the key figures on the stage of the literary nonfiction.

Mailer's interest in the notion of the American dream culminated in the novel *The American Dream* (1965) wherein the writer presents his own existentialist variant of the myth. This paper will focus upon Mailer's two nonfiction books *Advertisements for Myself* and *The Fight*. Written respectively in 1959 and 1974 these books cover the period of the sixties and seventies in the United States, the time being vastly important and controversial.

Mailer's Manifesto

Being Mailer's almost first attempt in the area of nonfiction, the collection of essays *Advertisements for Myself* represents the combination of fiction and nonfiction constituting seemingly a chaotic confusion of themes, ideas, images and events. The elaborate study, however reveals the unity of the collection under examination brought to life, on the one hand, by the general subject (as Mailer is interested primarily in the role of the writer in modern America and the place the USA occupies in the world) and, on the other hand, the omnipresence of the image of the author. Thus, the writer creates the collective image of the country, concentrating it in the image of Mailer – both the author and the character in one. Obviously the protagonist of Mailer's later nonfiction

or else the character called Norman Mailer originates from this collection. As distinct from *The Fight, Of a Fire on the Moon, Armies of the Night* the separate image called Norman Mailer does not exist in the collection, but his presence is palpable in the constant shift from the first person to the third person narration, thus from "I" to "He" within the framework of one and the same paragraph so that the distance between Mailer – the author and Mailer – the character may be created.

It should be noted here that the central place in the collection is occupied by the problem of the American dream in American society. Mailer seems to deny the democracy in the USA: "we live in a climate so reactionary" (183), "reactionary" being one of the most widely used epithets when the author refers to America. The writer's strong belief that American society is totalitarian is manifest in the collection. Therefore one of his main concerns is the question how the American dream is compatible with the "totalitarian character" of society. According to Mailer, modern American society is a vivid example of inconsistency between the American dream and the reality. The author believes that the American dream turns into the myth (or else false belief) and the official doctrine called to support the American way of life. In his ironical manner Mailer traces the modifications undergone by the American dream. For instance the main principle of equality ("all men are created equal") according to Mailer is substituted by a different one: "As a nation we are now dedicated to the principle that all men have an equal opportunity to cheat life" (353). The author's strong belief is that the pioneers and self-made men are already in the past and "a stench of fear has come out of every pore of American life and we suffer from a collective failure of nerve" (271). America in his nonfiction is a country of "psychopaths" (275):

...now we are a nation of drug addicts (caffeine, equanil, seconal and nicotine), of homosexuals, hoodlums, fart-faced Southern governors and a President so passive in his mild old panics that women would be annoyed if one called him feminine (23).

As this passage indicates the motif of "illness" of American society acquires grotesque features. Such conditions, Mailer believes, create the ground for the development of the establishment that he considers to be a synonym of totalitarian society motivating him to search for the "hero

of the time". Thus, Mailer suggests the society be divided into two main antagonistic types: Hipster and Square, emphasizing the rebellion and conformist characters respectively:

One is Hip or one is Square, one is a rebel or one conforms, one is a frontiersman in the Wild West of American night life, or else a Square cell, trapped in the totalitarian tissues of American society, doomed willy-nilly to conform if one is to succeed (272).

In *Advertisements* Norman Mailer creates semantic generalizations corresponding to the society division into rebels and conformists:

HIP – SQUARE
wild – practical
instinct – logic
Negro – White
self – society
free will – determinism
Catholic – Protestant
saint – clergyman
the child – the judge
sin – salvation (346)²

Many critics accused Mailer's gradation of being unduly categorical. The greatest extent of criticism was received by the point relating hipster to black Americans and square to white Americans. The author explained quoted division by the conditions black Americans were to live in: "any Negro who wishes to live must live with danger from his first day" (273). Thus living in the state of constant danger many black Americans in Mailer's opinion start to develop spiritually and make some of "the whites" follow them in such growth. Hipster according to Mailer can withstand the establishment and demolish the official myth of the American dream. The major contradiction though lays in the fact that hipster being a rebel is very similar to the initial ideal of the self-made man's individualism as a significant component of the concept of success. Therefore Mailer can not claim to create an entirely new character but rather a modified type brought to life by the rhetoric of

² It is not the complete list.

the American dream. But his innovation consists in his ambition to invent the special way for American society and American myth to develop.

The Conflict of Hipster and Square

In 1974 Mailer writes *The Fight* instantaneously responding with his sporting reportage to the famous boxing match between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman that took place in Zaire in 1974. However basically this book combines the features of sporting reportage with main techniques of fiction, particularly scene-by-scene construction, complete dialogue as recorded and remembered rather than journalism's selective quotations; varying the point of view, and even using third-person point of view; and "status" details that distinguish people, societies, and subcultures (Connery 1992: 3). On its thematic level the book can be read as a story about boxing, a book stating the problems of African Americans or the conflicts experienced by modern society. Mailer's innovation in writing the book lies in the fact that the boxing match is perceived as a model of the whole society. The book is built upon comparing two types of human personalities already mentioned above – that of Hip and that of Square. The match provides the material for rethinking author's previous philosophical views, the major symbolical meaning given to the fact that the fight is "the fight of Blacks" (23). As different from *Advertisements for Myself* in *The Fight* Norman Mailer abandons the juxtaposition of two conflicts – racial and ideological. As mentioned above for earlier Mailer hipster is necessarily "Negro" and only few "Whites" "grow up" to the level of African American. Thus Ali presents a definite type of "black" hipster whilst the image of Foreman controversies Mailer's initial paradigm "Negro – hipster; White – conformist". At first Foreman is presented as a typical reflection of the myth of the American dream. His image seems to be a literary realization of the dream's concepts aired by Abraham Lincoln: "I happen temporarily to occupy this big White House. I am a living witness that any one of your children may look to come here as my father's child has...The nation is worth fighting for, to secure such an inestimable jewel" (Cullen 2003: 74). Foreman seemingly passes a long way "from standing on the corner of Lyons Avenue ready to get into something with anybody'd come along. I'd hit 'em and take their

cigarettes. That's a long way off from fighting in Kinshasa, Africa" (170). Mailer emphasizes Foreman's recognition of his belonging to the American Ideal, one of its evidences being that Foreman concludes every interview saying: "Don't talk down the American system to me, its rewards can be there for anybody if he will make up his mind, bend his back, lean hard into his chores and refuse to allow anything to defeat him. I'll wave that flag in every public place I can" (91). Being the supporter of the American system, however, Foreman cannot be considered an exact Square. Mailer characterizes Squares as passive and seeking stability. The image of Foreman is much more complex. His worldview is that of the Square, but his position is active and it recalls the Hipster. Mailer indicates that Foreman is ready to fight for the American establishment and perceives his victories in the ring as victories of the American system.

The image of Ali is opposite. Obviously the author chooses him as a mouthpiece. Mailer emphasizes that the fight in 1974 is the first Ali takes part in after a long break since he was disqualified for boxing due to his refusal to agitate for the Vietnam War, the fact that gives Mailer an opportunity to draw a parallel between him and Ali. For Mailer the most important detail is that Ali fights with conformist Foreman. As Foreman perceives his victories as the victories of the establishment, Ali perceives his as the victories of his worldview over the establishment. The boxer, according to Mailer, conceives himself as a spiritual leader, "a world leader, president not only of America or even of a United Africa, but leader of half the Western world" (72). Muhammad Ali opposes himself to the American system that makes people follow official myths. The writer lays emphasis on Ali's firm belief that the American dream is the dream of "white America" and it failed to be democratic from the earliest stages.

Besides, Mailer rethinks his previous approach to the religious conflict between Hipster and Square. As distinct from his earlier belief that "Hipster is Catholic and Square is Protestant", he creates a different opposition in *The Fight*: "Hipster is Muslim and Square is Protestant" that indicates the fact that the writer elaborates the idea that religion also serves the means to oppose to the establishment, so Hipster chooses the religion that is not mainstream.

Thus, *The Fight* reflects a new stage in Mailer's theory of the society and the impact of the American dream upon it. In the boxing match the author, on the one hand, observes evidence of rectitude of his

theory of society division and, on the other, the fight proves that American society and the American dream present more complicated and intricate phenomenon as opposed to Mailer's earlier ideas.

Concluding Remarks

As examples of Mailer's literary nonfiction *Advertisements for Myself* and *The Fight* present the author's philosophical, aesthetic and social views. They are brought together by the author's consuming interest in the concept of the American dream. As stated above the myth of the American dream occupies a significant place in the creativity of different American writers. Mailer, however, elaborates an original interpretation of the dream. Mailer views the dream as the stereotype that influences the creed and way of life of different layers of society and thus being a stereotype it becomes the ground for the totalitarian society which he understands in a spiritual rather than in a political sense. *Advertisements for Myself* stand apart from Mailer's creative works being a combination of fiction works and essays dedicated to the major problems of American society and literature. The American dream is interpreted as an "illness" of American society and the author in the person of hipsters tries to find those able to fight with the "disease". In *The Fight* Mailer realizes the concept of hipsterism in the face of Muhammad Ali who according to the author fights a religious war with Squares.

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Debunking National Myths in Anna Deavere Smith's *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* and Andrew Moodie's *Riot*

CAROLINE DE WAGTER

I. Introduction

In his book, *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation*, Jim Cullen explains how the United States is essentially "a creation of the collective imagination" (2003: 6). Unlike most other nations, the U.S. defines itself not on the facts of blood, religion, language, or shared history, but on a set of ideals articulated in the Declaration of Independence and consolidated in the Constitution. At the core of these ideals lies the ambiguous idea of the American Dream, a "national motto" that has proven to be amazingly evasive and yet durable for hundreds of years across racial, class, and other demographic lines.

The American Dream is such a familiar phrase that one rarely pauses to define the term or trace its origin. In his book, Cullen explores the multiple facets of the American Dream that have shaped American identity from the age of the Pilgrims to the present. From "Promised Land" to Abraham Lincoln's dream of "Upward Mobility," the American dream's ambiguity "is the very source of its mystique power" (ib. 7). The American dream resonates with individual fulfillment, economic success, social advancement, quest for equality in the post-Civil War era, and most recently with fame and fortune epitomized in the culture of Hollywood.

Among other scholars, Seymour Martin Lipset has outlined a detailed comparative analysis of the national characteristics of Canada and the United States. As Lipset notes, to the U.S. motto of "life,

liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” emphasizing the rights of the individual, Canada’s principles of “peace, order and good government” imply ideas of control and protection, a role essentially done by the state itself. (1986: 114–124). Moreover, while Americans self-assuredly define themselves in terms of a series of shared ideals – the American Creed –, Canadians often question whether their country has a national identity at all (ib. 123–124).

Envisioned as a nation where each crisis constitutes a “provisional milestone in the history of a country free of the weight of bloody history and reverent constitutionalism” (Powe 1997: 24), the “Canadian experiment” has been lauded by critics such as B. W. Powe for instance in his book *A Canada of Light*. Partly a hymn to Canada’s unrealized potential, partly a polemic against the politicians who have betrayed those possibilities, Powe’s *A Canada of Light* re-imagines Canadian national identity as a communication state – a counter-nation where dialogue, debate and the exchange of information hold people together. In this sense, *A Canada of Light* points to the urgent realization of a new and liberating way of what it means to be Canadian. Countering George Grant’s pessimistic *Lament for a Nation*, which defined the intellectual climate in Canada for decades, Powe argues that Canada’s constant search for and questioning of its identity could possibly turn it into a model for the 21st century.

However, even if Canada was officially proclaimed a multicultural nation, an image often legitimated by the myth of the “cultural mosaic,” it seems that the Canadian multicultural policy nevertheless hides mechanisms of assimilation similar to that of the American “melting pot.” As many commentators have noted, the experiences of multiculturalism in Canada and melting pot in the U.S. have been an oversimplification which obscures the fact that Canada and the United States have shared similar immigration policies, especially in tendencies of nativism, anglo-conformity, and anti-foreign sentiments.¹

Neither melting pot nor mosaic seems a wholly accurate description of the United States and Canada’s complex social and ethnic realities,

¹ In this regard, see Valeria Gennaro Lerda’s *From ‘Melting Pot’ to Multiculturalism: The Evolution of Ethnic Relations in the United States and Canada*, Neil Bissoondath’s *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada*, and *Comparative Perspectives on Ethnicity, Race, and Nation*, John Buenker & Lorman Ratner’s *Multiculturalism in the United States: a Comparative Guide to Acculturation and Ethnicity*, among others.

but these terms have been used to convey the image of these two countries multi-ethnicity.

Interestingly, the last thirty years or so have witnessed the emergence of a number of plays, both on the American and Canadian theatrical scenes, which have become reflectors of these countries intricate multi-ethnic character. My paper focuses on two playwrights from African heritage: American Anna Deavere Smith and Canadian Andrew Moodie. Even though these theatre practitioners belong to different national context and resort to dissimilar performative strategies, their works display similarities in their thematic concerns. Indeed, Smith's *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* and Moodie's *Riot* constitute provoking case studies enabling us to underline the importance of minority cultural dramatic productions in the process of debunking national myths. While *Twilight* subtly demystifies the American dream – its promises of success and ethos of egalitarianism – *Riots* deconstructs the myth of the Canadian multicultural dream by revealing the shortcomings of Canada's utopian societal project. The cross-national approach offered by this paper will seek to show how Smith and Moodie's multi-ethnic documentary theatre explores ethnic boundaries and multi-faceted identities in an attempt to re-invent their respective "nation's character."

II. Anna Deavere Smith's *Twilight Los Angeles, 1992*

Since 1979, African American actress, playwright, and teacher, Anna Deavere Smith has been creating a series of one-woman show performances entitled *On the Road: A Search for American Character*. Smith's focus shifted from individuals to groups of individuals at gatherings, or as members of a community. The series includes *Building Bridges Not Walls* (1985), *On Black Identity and Black Theatre* (1990), *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights Brooklyn and Other Identities* (1993), *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* (1994), and *House Arrest* (1997). A celebrated personality as much as a celebrated artist, Smith has functioned as a commentator on politics, sociology, education, as well as theatre.²

² For more details about Anna Deavere Smith's career, see for instance, Carol Martin's interview – "Anna Deavere Smith: The Word Becomes You."

Smith's innovative documentary theatre and acting practices have unleashed vivid debates and provoked a plethora of scholarly articles. While Dorinne Kondo considers Smith as "one of the key originators of documentary performance" (1994: 96), Ryan Claycomb calls her plays the "hallmarks of contemporary, staged oral history" (1993: 98).³ Basing the scripts of her plays entirely on interview material and performing all the interviewees herself on stage using the latter's own words, Smith's project demands, as Charles and James Lyons have claimed, a "new approach to the practices of both acting and playwriting" (1994: 43). Many commentators have addressed the multiple challenges caused by Smith's work as an actress and playwright. As Carol Martin claims, "Smith's apparently hypernaturalistic mimesis – in which she replicates not only the words of different individuals but their bodily style as well – is deceiving" (2002: 334). In their analysis, Charles and James Lyons likewise insist on the "intricately devised organization" of Smith's plays (1994: 44).

In the introduction to the play, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*,⁴ Smith explains the multiple stages that were necessary to develop her play. Like a journalist, Smith interviewed more than 200 people – family members, victims, participants, observers, journalists, critics – related to a particular historical moment: the civil disturbance which took place in April 1992, commonly known as the Los Angeles riots. Smith's introduction clearly details the facts:

In the Spring of 1991, Rodney King, a black man, was severely beaten by four white Los Angeles police officers after a high-speed chase in which King was pursued for speeding. A nearby resident videotaped the beating from the balcony of his apartment. When the videotape was broadcast on national television, there was an immediate outcry from the community. The next year, the police officers who beat Rodney King were tried and found not

³ In this regard, also see the influence of oral history writer Studs Terkel on Anna Deavere Smith, as explained in detail in Naomi Matsuoka's "Murakami Haruki and Anna Deavere Smith: Truth by Interview."

⁴ *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* was commissioned by Gordon Davidson, artistic director of the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles, in May 1992. In this paper, all quotes come from *Twilight Los Angeles, 1992*, published by Anchor Books, and abbreviated as T.

guilty [...] Three days of burning, looting, and killing scarred Los Angeles and captured the attention of the world. (1994: xviii)

From the numerous interviews recored on tape, Smith selects about 25 (performance script) to 50 "representative" voices (published script). In itself, this process is already problematic as it raises the question as to what is a representative voice. In the New York version directed by George Wolfe, Smith acknowelgdes that they tried to recreate a section of the play which would be reminiscent of "a multicultural dream. We looked very hard through all the material to find really positive, good-thinking Asian American, Latino, white, black. And we *constructed* that" (2001: 251, my emphasis). For other versions however, Smith "adds or substracts characters to suit the needs of particular audiences or her own evolving ideas so that each performance is unique and cannot be fully duplicated" (Connor 2001: 181).⁵ The product of careful selective processes, *Twilight* clearly constitutes a constructed performance piece: from selecting the interviewees, to narrowing the corpus down to representative voices, to editing the published script, Smith's innovative theatre genre finds itself at the cross-road between journalism, documentary and performance.⁶

As part of a wider research project, *On the Road: A Search for America's Character*, *Twilight* presents the playwright's "search" and gradual accumulation of her corpus. As for a documentary, the multiple perspectives offered in the play strongly aim at reinforcing the sense of objectivity. The voices incorporated into the performance are from

⁵ The reader is advised to turn to Kimberly Rae Connor's article "Negotiating the Differences." In it, Connor compares Smith with a jazz musician who adopts an improvisational style for each performance. Therefore, Connor further notes, Smith's performances "are, by definition, always works in progress" (2001: 181).

⁶ In "Improper Conjunctions: Metaphor, Performance and Text," Alice Rayner analyzes the refusal of the Pulitzer committee to nominate Anna Deavere Smith's *Twilight* on basis that the play was not an imaginary world in a fictive text but a docu-drama and/or performance act. Similarly, *Twilight* raised doubts to cultural critics, who found the piece "too neutral," lacking "personal and political evaluation of events in Los Angeles or the culture at large" (1995: 3). In her article, Rayner complicates conventional oppositions between fiction and reality, text and performance in an attempt to understand these responses.

different ethnic identities – blacks, Latinos, Koreans, whites – from various social positions – including the former president of Los Angeles Police Commission, a representative of Coalition against Police Abuse, an actor, an artist, a scholar, a former gang member, as well as from different gender and generations. Smith's acting method based on her interview technique and her "ability to bring into existence the 'wondrous' [...] presence of performer and performed" (Schechner quoted in Connor 2001: 162) encourage the spectator to witness and engage in a dialogue across difference rather than to choose "sides" or pass blunt judgements.

Besides, Smith's refusal to enclose her investigations within a coherent explanatory narrative shatters the notion of absolute truth or authority. Instead, the play offers the "double-voiced-ness" of Smith both embracing the character's stories and pointing to the gap between them (Cho 2005: 67). Dorinne Kondo claims that Smith's acting method challenges the Stanislavsky method – linearity of objectives, intense scrutiny of the actor's and character's subjectivities, and reinscription of the interiority of the psyche. (1994: 96) Approaching "character from the 'outside,'" Smith develops it "not from self-absorption and interiorized motivation, but in the attentive reproduction of gesture, voice, and mannerism" (ib. 96). Similarly, other critics, such as Debby Thompson, argue that Smith's acting practices relate to a "post-structuralist model of racial identity" (2003: 127). In contrast to the preponderant U.S. school of Naturalistic acting, positing an "inner core, truth, or essence to a character" (ib. 128), Smith approaches racial identity as performative. (ib. 130). From this "other-oriented" approach, Thompson further claims, "the goal of performance becomes, then, not authenticity but exploitation of the gap between self and other, actor and character" (ib.). Whether male or female, old or young, black, Korean, Latino, or white, Smith performs all the characters herself. The fact that Smith does portray white people as well as people of color indeed complicates her performances and allows her to address what Kondo calls "the utopian hopes and tensions animating what might better be characterized as a politics of affiliation emblemized in such terms as Latino, Asian American, women of color, people of color, queer, and others for which we may not yet have names" (1994: 85). Smith thereby explodes racial delineation and presents more complicated relationships among people of color, between social classes, and within ethnic communities.

As Claycomb posits, “docudrama and oral history performance have migrated from film and television to occupy a prominent space on the American stage speaks to a changing perception of an heightened urgency to rethink conventional notions of community” (1993: 95). Working in collaboration with several dramaturges from different ethnic backgrounds – Japanese American anthropologist Dorinne Kondo, Guatemalan-American reporter Hector Tobar, African American poet Elizabeth Alexander, among others – Smith’s documentary theater serves as an instrument to help people see beyond fixed and narrow categories. Attacking the black-and-white canvas, Smith strongly criticizes binary simplifications: “We tend to think of race as us and them – us being black or white depending on one’s own color. The relationships among peoples of color and within racial groups are more and more complicated” (Smith 1994: xxi). Smith urges her audience to “reach across ethnic boundaries” in order to comprehend new “multi-faced identities” (ib. xxv). In this sense, *Twilight* invites us to consider what Dorinne Kondo calls “cross racial identification, alliance, and cleavage, leading us to reconsider the very definitions and formations of race itself” (Kondo 1994: 83).

In the course of the play, divided into multiple sections – Prologue, The Territory, Here’s a Nobody, War Zone, Twilight, and Justice – Smith presents characters whose experiences not only challenge race and social delineations, but also demystify the U.S. ethos of egalitarianism and the false promises of the American dream. So for instance, director Peter Sellars comments on Eugene O’Neill’s “classic play about the American Dream” (T 200) *Long Day’s Journey into Night*. Sharply criticizing the American dream of success, Sellars compares the L.A. riots to a burning house where the American family, like the Tyrone’s, is falling apart. Further, the playwright embodies Mrs. Young-Soon Han, a former liquor store owner, whose disillusionment in the American dream echoes Cullen’s analysis.⁷ While Mrs. Han “believed America is the best” and still “believe[s] it [...] now,” she nevertheless claims that “Korean immigrants were left out” from American society: “What is our right? / Is it because we are Korean? Is it because we have not politicians? / Is it because we don’t/ speak good English? Why?” (T 245). As a matter of fact, Han’s testimony deeply

⁷ More particularly, see Chapter 4 – King of America: The Dream of Equality (103–131).

resonates with the many minority immigrants who were left out of the American Dream, whose rights, voices, and experiences remained unheard or forgotten.

In the published script, Smith also includes a phone interview with literary critic Homi K. Bhabha. Bhabha's postcolonial theories and more particularly its concept of in-betweenness offer precious insights into the play. As Bhabha repeatedly claims in *The Location of Culture* and other writings, one needs to go beyond formulations of cultural imperialism and simplified binarisms. Bhabha insists on overcoming the exoticism of cultural diversity in favour of an empowering hybridity within which cultural difference may operate. (1994: 43–49). In this regard, named after Twilight Bey, an ex-gang member, the play's title proves deeply symbolic. In-between day and night, the image of "twilight" depicts a transitional state. As Bhabha claims: "This twilight moment/ is an in-between moment./ It's the moment of dusk./ It's the moment of ambivalence/ and ambiguity" (T 232). Symbolically, the "fuzziness of twilight/ allows us to see the intersections/ of the event with a number of other things that daylight/ obscures for/ us, to use a paradox" (Bhabha 1994: 233). In this sense, *Twilight* challenges audiences and readers to "interpret more [...] to make ourselves/ part of the act," to "project" ourselves "onto the event itself," and "react to it" (T 233–234). With its "incredible ability to disturb us and inspire us" (2001: 32), Smith's theatre becomes in Guinier's apt formulation a powerful tool "to intervene, to shift not only the way people think *about* the moment, but potentially to energize them to do something differently *in* that moment" (ib. 33, emphases in original).

III. Andrew Moodie's *Riot*

Based in Ontario, African Canadian Andrew Moodie is, like Smith, an actor and playwright. He has performed in many theatrical, film and television productions including *Separate Development*, *The Second Shapard's Play*, *Better Living*, and *Our Country's Good* at the Great Canadian Theatre Company. His plays include *Oui* (Factory Theatre), *Wilbur Country Blues* (Blythe Festival), *A Common Man's Guide to Loving Woman* (National Arts Centre and Canadian Stage Company), *The Lady Smith* (Theatre Passe Muraille), as well as *Riot* (1995), which

premiered at the Factory Theatre and won the Chalmers Canadian Play Award for Best New Play.⁸

A critical commentary on and response to the L.A. Riots, Moodie's play, *Riot*, also dramatizes the ensuing "Yonge Street Riot" which erupted in Toronto in May 1992. Sparked by a police shooting of a Black youth, Raymond Lawrence, The Yonge Street Riot, started as a peaceful march led by Black Action Defence Committee at the U.S. Consulate. In the aftermath of the not guilty verdict in the Rodney King's trial, the protest escalated into a riot on Yonge Street resulting in the looting and destruction of numerous Yonge Street stores. Renowned for its harmonious ethnic relations, Toronto, perhaps the world's most multicultural city, was deeply shaken by these events. Unlike Smith's docudrama genre, Moodie's play does not constitute the product of verbatim interviews performed on stage. Nor does it offer viewpoints from different ethnic communities. Set against the backdrop of real historical events, *Riot* presents fictional conversations between characters belonging to one and the same ethnic community.

While Smith's *Twilight* blurs the boundaries between several ethnic groups (African, Latino, Korean, etc), Moodie's *Riot* portrays conflicting views within the Afri-Canadian community. In stark contrast to Smith's solo performance, Moodie's *Riot* presents a multi-ethnic cast of six Black players. While all characters are Canadian, they come from many different parts of Canada and have highly dissimilar histories: Wendle comes from Halifax (Nova Scotia); Alex is from Ottawa; Henry is an immigrant from Uganda; Effie is from Vancouver, Kirk comes from Kingston (Jamaica) and his sister, Grace was born in Jamaica, and raised in Montreal since she is three. Clearly, the play's heterogeneous cast of characters calls for a complex redefinition of the concept African Canadianness and Black identities in general.

Since the 1960s, the call for political solidarity among minority groups took precedence over internal differences and forged a sense of collective identity. Even though broad labels – such as African Canadian or African American – constitute dangerously globalizing categories that sometimes erase personal history and diversity, many critics have also rightly argued that these labels nonetheless reinforce the political, cultural and social power of collective identity formations.

⁸ All quotes from the play come from Moodie's *Riot* – D. Sears, ed., *Testifyin': Contemporary African Drama. Vol. I.*, abbreviated as R.

However, Afri-Canadian or African American as articulated through theatre and literature in general does not so much stand for the voices and experiences of a united community; rather it symbolizes, an “imaginary or desired states of being and relation” (Josephine Lee, 1997: 9). The terms not only cover an extremely diverse population but also one in constant change and evolution. Immigration increases, interracial marriages, and many other factors, all complicate concepts of “community” and “identity.” In this sense, the attempts of various playwrights, performers, audiences, and critics to define and talk about Asian, African, Latino or Native theatre reveal “an intensely imagined commonality.” (Lee, 1997: 9–10) In *Riot*, the protagonists’ numerous cultural backgrounds within one and the same African Canadian ethnic group, suggest as Stuart Hall points out in “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” the extraordinary diversity of the subjective positions, social experiences and cultural identities which comprise the category labelled as “Black” (2003: 234). In this sense, by constructing a Black diasporic Canada, Moodie’s playwriting further fractures the Canadian mosaic and challenges the audience to re-imagine a complex Afri-Canadian community.

Set in a Toronto house, *Riot* serves as a space for debate and exchange about burning questions such as Quebec nationalism, slavery in Nova Scotia, Canadian immigration and racism. The play opens with Wendle’s igniting statement: “Fuck Quebec!” (R 9) which in turn unleashes a vivid debate about the French language and culture, issues of cultural appropriation and ethnic rights. As is the case in numerous other plays by Afri-Canadian writers, such as for instance Jay Bunuyan’s *Prodigals in a Promised Land* or Djanet Sears’ *Harlem Duet*, *Riot* demystifies the image of Canada as a welcoming paradise to immigrants. In the course of the play, Henry, an immigrant from Uganda and owner of an electric company, claims: “it’s not easy being an immigrant in this country, especially if you’re black they don’t respect your education your training...” (R 57). Likewise, Grace narrates: “My aunt and uncle are from Jamaica. They worked their finger to the bone trying to make it in this country. [...] They saved every penny they had to give me the education they felt I deserved. And they are not alone. All over the country there are Jamaicans just like them” (R 65). These two passages strongly remind the audience of Canada’s harsh reality. In stark contrast to the mythical paradise of milk

and honey, Moodie's *Riot* presents the actual predicament of countless immigrants in so-called tolerant multicultural Canada.

In addition, debates around issues of racism permeate the entire play. Wendle, the play's strongest critic of Canada's pervasive racism, expresses his opinion:

This country is racist from top to bottom. From the police force, to the military, to the business sector, to the CBS [...] Because this country is run by white people and that's just the way white people are. It's in their nature. It's in their generic make up to try to fuck us over every opportunity they get. (R 19)

While Alex points out that Wendle's own arguments are indeed "racist" (R 19), Wendle responds by asserting that "In the States you can fight racism because they're so open about it. That way, black people have more opportunities. Canada is ten times more racist than the States but they hide it here" (R 19–20). In the context of this paper, this protagonist's statement proves particularly interesting. Indeed, not only does it sharply demystify the Canadian multicultural dream. Through Wendle, Moodie also strongly criticizes the inherent hypocrisy of a Canadian society that is at least as racist as the American one. The writer demands that his audience "stop living in a dream world" (R 20) and wake up to the harsh reality behind Canada's utopian societal project.

Interestingly, Wendle's statement also reveals the incredible mystical power of the American Dream – golden opportunities and equality for all – invading the Canadian imagination as well. While Smith clearly debunks this national myth throughout her plays, Moodie portrays a character who still naively believes in America's utopian promises. However, Wendle's idealized assertions are rapidly debunked by the release of the "Not guilty" (R 23) verdict in the first Rodney King's trial through the television set onstage. The ensuing protagonists' reactions further reinforce Moodie's criticism: Effie: "Where were the black people on that jury?;" Grace: "There's got to be an appeal," Henry: "do they not see a human being?" and Wendle: "I swear to God I try not to hate white people. [...] I try to turn the other cheek, but [...] I only have so many cheeks" (R 23–24). Even though the characters' opinions vary widely on virtually every topic throughout

the play, in this particular instance, the heterogeneous cast of characters converges as one voice expressing solidarity and sympathy towards each other, as well as towards African Americans.

In this regard, despite the fact that Moodie's *Riot* erases the suggestion of a singular Blackness or Black community, the play, Walcott argues, is nevertheless able to produce forms of identification so that "this multi-ethnic Blackness is identified with and acts in solidarity with forms of African American Blackness" (2005: 82). Indeed, trans-national identifications, mediated through the CNN channel on the TV set recasting the Rodney King's trial, not only establish a parallel between the the L.A. Riots and the Yonge Street Riots – thereby emphasizing the racism and injustice prevalent in both U.S. and Canadian societies. It also concurs with Walcott's claim that "Black Canadian theatre is forged and performed within the context of a diasporic sensibility and/or consciousness" (ib. 80).

Where Smith theatrically reports on community in crisis, finding "American character in the way people speak" (Smith qtd in Dolan 2005: 87), Moodie presents, as Walcott argues, "different kinds of attachments to the Canadian nation" (2005: 82) according to what the nation means to each protagonist's sensibility. In this sense, Moodie not only destabilizes the imagined community of African Canadians – portraying it as internally differentiated and profoundly diasporic (ib. 82) – he also interrogates the multiple facets of Canada's national identity. In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson questions the concept of nation, which he calls a "pure invention of the mind" (2006: 129). Interestingly, Anderson underlines the fact that nationalism's roots are to be found in fear and hatred of the 'Other' and in its affinities with racism. However, it is also useful to remember, Anderson claims, that nations inspire love, and often self-sacrificing love, that is often reflected in the cultural products of nationalism – poetry, prose fiction, music, plastic arts. Dramatic texts and performances are no exceptions. They reflect upon, question and challenge the "imagined community" of the nation.

Relying on Anderson's concept of "imagined communities," Alan Filewod demonstrates in *Performing Canada*, how theatre is a legitimizing performance of the "imagined community" that is the nation. Indeed, it is important to highlight the long-standing and reciprocal relationship between theatre and history. Throughout the centuries,

Filewod indicates, theatre has functioned as a ceremonial test in which the national imaginary is enacted, codified, scrutinized, and monumentalized. (2002: 4). As symbolic rituals, theatre performances thus also inscribe crucial historical moments into a nation's cultural imaginary.

Following Filewod's argument, Smith's *Twilight* and Moodie's *Riot* constitute performances of desire and surrogation, of lost authenticities reclaimed through spectacle. (ib. xvii). As a (re)citation of the post-colonial crises of authenticity, displacement, racism and injustice, Smith and Moodie's theatre practices thus constitute sites of resistance for those who were previously oppressed and silenced. Not only do they destabilize the assumptions that produce the normative narrative of the nation as white, benevolent and just. Each in their own ways, they posit a history of injustice and degradation, thereby unsettling the dominant myth of multiculturalism. In the light of Filewod's arguments, *Twilight* and *Riot* thus become legitimizing performances of the "imagined community" that constitutes America and Canada, respectively.

IV. Conclusion

These two case studies will hopefully provide a model for a cross-national analysis that could fruitfully be extended to other works from the body of North American drama. Through the fabric of theatre, Anna Deavere Smith and Andrew Moodie unleash our imaginations. While Smith relies on an innovative type of documentary theatre based on real interviews, Moodie anchors a fictive story in real historical events, resonating locally (Toronto riots) and internationally (L.A. Riots). Even though Smith's solo performance contrasts with Moodie's multi-ethnic cast, both plays are nevertheless polyphonic as they undeniably present conflicting opinions of numerous voices. Thematizing urgent social issues, the plays discussed refigure artistic practice in an attempt to transform consciousness. These provoking works not only question the elusive notion of Americanness and Canadianness, but also open up new avenues enabling us to re-think the complexity of national myths in contemporary American and Canadian multicultural societies.

In "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Stuart Hall evokes a type of identity that is unstable, metaphoric, and even contradictory – an identity marked by multiple points of similarities as well as critical

aspects of significant difference. Instead of conceiving of identity as a rigid category, Hall proposes to re-imagine identity as “a ‘production’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (2003: 234). As a “site of cultural confrontation, possibility for creolization and points of new becomings” (ib. 237), Smith and Moodie transform the theatrical space into what Jill Dolan calls a “utopian performative,” a platform where “diverse monologues, [...] discrepant points of view” are woven into “a staged conversation” (2005: 87).

Within the specific space of theatre, “a house for contradictions and extremes” (Smith 2001: 32), these playwrights’ works constitute as much a “call to the community” (1994: xxiv) as to our imagination. Their innovative docudramas not only open up the possibility of dialogues across and within communities, they also propel their audience to dare re-imagine another America, another Canada. On the one hand, *Twilight Bey* wisely teaches us to reach across and towards others: “I can’t forever dwell in darkness, I can’t forever dwell in the idea, of just identifying with people like me and understanding me and mine” (T 255). On the other, *Riot* concludes with Alex’s moving confession:

I would lay down on the grass and look up at the big blue sky [...] I would stretch my arms out and try to touch the edge of Canada, but it was too big. So I would [...] grab fistfuls of grass and I would hug Canada. And you know what... it you stay really really really still, after a while, it almost feels like Canada is hugging you back. (R 77)

In this sense, both plays contain, in embryo, the promises of a dream awaiting to be fulfilled.

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Rooting the *omphalos* at Mossbawn: Seamus Heaney and Classical Mythology

JUAN RÁEZ PADILLA

The past as *personal helicon* or source of inspiration for the poetic recreation and reconstruction of the present is a recurrent topic in the poetry of Seamus Heaney. Mythology, therefore, is an outstanding presence in the Northern Irish writer's oeuvre. The myth of the *Mother Earth* – giving birth to all human existence, but also its ultimate grave –, for example, is a powerful symbol at the beginning of Heaney's career, which tactfully permeates through his most controversial poems on the fratricide violence among Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland at the end of the 1960s. These are the so-called *bog poems* in the collections *Wintering Out* (1972) and *North* (1975), which, according to Goodby and Phillips, have "open[ed] a can of worms that (in Irish critical circles, at least) has never really been closed" (2001: 24). A book by P. V. Glob, *The Bog People* (1969), was decisive in Heaney's early mythology of anthropophagy and sacrifice: in that book Glob writes about the unearthed bodies of men and women who were preserved in the bogs of Jutland and who date back to the Iron Age. According to this author, some of these men and women (such as 'The Tollund Man' in Heaney's *Wintering Out*, 1972) were offered in sacrifice to the Mother Earth, who in turn guaranteed the eternal cycle of life. This mythic pattern offered to Heaney a consoling parallel to the internecine violence in Northern Ireland at the end of the 1960s / beginning of the 1970s (the so-called *The Troubles*) which, nonetheless, was not deprived of disapproval by some critics who understood such mythology as a dangerous aestheticization and legitimization of violence.¹

¹ See, for example, Carson (1975), Coughlan (1997), Cullingford (1990) and Lloyd (1997).

Maybe the most memorable poem in this respect is 'Punishment', where the Nobel prize winner draws a parallel between a young woman from the Age of Bronze, murdered for adultery and preserved in the bogs from the north of Europe, and many other Northern Irish women ("your betraying sisters" below) who, during the Troubles, were tarred and feathered as a punishment for their romances with the English soldiers who occupied the Ulster (origin of frequent acts of espionage):

Little adulteress,
before they punished you
you were flaxen-haired,
undernourished, and your
tar-black face was beautiful.
My poor scapegoat,

I almost love you
but would have cast, I know,
the stones of silence.

[...]

I who have stood dumb
when your betraying sisters,
cauled in tar,
wept by the railings

who would connive
in civilized outrage
yet understand the exact
and tribal, intimate revenge.

(Heaney 1975: 30–31, vv. 23–31, 37–44)

The Northern Irish conflict and Heaney's desire to rationalize the atrocities committed at his homeland are at the base of this initial atavistic mytho-symbolism of violence. Nonetheless, between the poem 'The Tollund Man', published in 1972, and 'Tollund', published in 1996, there exists a mythological revision triggered in Heaney's verse by the new turn of events in the recent history of Northern Ireland. Light is a symbol of optimism in 'Tollund'. The poet keeps the promise he once made in 'The Tollund Man' – "Some day I will go to Aarhus" (1972: 36, l, v. 1) – and writes about a Sunday in Tollund Moss,

Jutland, the aforementioned context for a good part of his early mytho-symbolism of sacrifice. While the poem from 1972 juxtaposed Irish reality with the terrible barbarity of bog sacrifice in early Iron Age times, the poem from *The Spirit Level* (1996) arises from a much closer and promising reality: the ceasefire from the IRA and the main unionist paramilitary groups in August 1994. That is why the poem is dated "September 1994" (1996: 69), smitten with the optimism of the ceasefire proclaimed in Northern Ireland just a month before.² The atavistic darkness of 'The Tollund Man' yields way in 'Tollund' to a land of *dormant, silent* bogs (1996: 69, vv. 7, 8), only disturbed by "light traffic sound" (1996: 69, v. 5). This rural scene of quietness gave off a new light: "It could have been a still out of the bright / 'Townland of Peace', that poem of dream farms / Outside all contention", writes Heaney (1996: 69, vv. 9–11). The mythic sacrifices are subsumed within a modern landscape, where a scarecrow's arms "stood open opposite the satellite / Dish in the paddock" (ib. vv. 12–13). A dolmen is demystified into "a standing stone / [...] With tourist signs in *futhark* runic script / In Danish and in English" (ib. vv. 13, 15–16). That is not the same Tollund as in years past. "Things had moved on" (ib. v. 16). Things were moving on as well in Northern Ireland. Whereas the young Heaney imagined there, in Jutland, that he would "feel lost, / Unhappy and at home" (1972: 37, III, vv. 11–12), his updated counterpart is much less pessimistic, the middle-aged poet finds himself there "footloose, at home beyond the tribe" (1996: 69, v. 20).³ Far from atavism (note *beyond the tribe*), hope lightens up. A new future for Heaney and his community could at last be foreseen:

² In 1996 this first ceasefire by the IRA stops, and it is renewed again in July 1997 after the Labour victory in Great Britain. The most important day in the recent history of pacification of Northern Ireland is 10 April 1998, when the *Good Friday Agreement* was signed by the British and Irish governments, as well as by most Northern Irish political parties, including Sinn Féin, the IRA's political arm, and the Ulster Unionist Party.

³ Neil Corcoran notes about this: "'Tollund' is a self-corrective poem and gesture, a revisiting of the old ground to possess it newly and differently" (1998: 205).

More scouts than strangers, ghosts who'd walked abroad
 Unfazed by light, to make a new beginning
 And make a go of it, alive and sinning,
 Ourselves again,⁴ free-willed again, not bad.
 (1996: 69, vv. 21–24)

Heaney's use of mythology, nonetheless, goes far beyond the poetic exploration of a world of violence and sacrifice which rooted in many of his early poems. In the next few pages, as a matter of fact, it will be my purpose to concentrate on a different type of mythology: classical mythology, especially Greek mythology. The classical allusions and myths in Heaney's works, in contrast with the aforementioned mythology of violence in the first part of his literary career, is particularly outstanding in his most recent collections. I will offer several references, re-examinations or *transfusions* (using a Heaney term) from Greek mythology into the poetry of Seamus Heaney and, most importantly, I will try to offer my own reading of the literary and cultural ideology lying behind these examples, thus trying to directly address the roles and motivations spurring the use of great cultural and literary myths in contemporary literature. I hope my answer on Seamus Heaney's poetry may cast some light – hopefully, some questions as well – on this ongoing debate in modern literary criticism.

Different gods and heroes from Greek mythology are explicitly or implicitly present in Heaney's works. The couple Antaeus-Hercules is a particularly important one. They symbolize the everlasting struggle between earth (Antaeus) and air (Hercules) in Heaney's verse. Antaeus' invincible strength depended on his permanent contact with the Earth – his mother –, whereas Hercules, Zeus' son, was of celestial origin. We should remember that in classical mythology Hercules succeeded in defeating Antaeus by firmly holding him up in the air and thus cutting off the energy which he constantly received from the Earth. Hence the airy symbolism of liberation from earthy bounds represented by Hercules in Heaney's poetry. In *North* (1975) two poems containing Antaeus symbolism open and close the first part of the book (*Part I*),

⁴ The expression *ourselves again* is especially revealing in the Northern Irish context: the translation into English of the IRA's political arm, *Sinn Féin*, is *Ourselves Alone* (Murphy 2000: 103). Heaney thus detaches himself from this other type of atavistic isolation in favour of a much more plural and reconciliatory concept of *Irishness* (*ourselves again*).

which highlights the importance of earthy symbolism in this book of poems and in the first part of Heaney's literary career. He who may want to defeat him, writes Heaney in 'Antaeus', "may well throw me and renew my birth / But let him not plan, lifting me off the earth, / My elevation, my fall" (1975: 3, vv. 18–20). In the poem 'Hercules and Antaeus', on the other hand, the victory of Hercules over Antaeus symbolizes England's colonization and victory over Ireland, Heaney's original earthy muse; as Antaeus, "the mould-hugger" (1975: 46, v. 8). The move towards airy symbolism in the second part of Heaney's literary career (according to an outstanding number of critics)⁵ has been precisely noted by criticism with this same mythological trope. According to Seamus Deane, for example,

The act of poetry is a Herculean effort to lift off from the old Antaeus-like hugging of the holy and violent ground into the realm of air and fire, the zone of vision, not merely the dry air of rational enlightenment. Heaney's later poetry is full of subtle slicings that confirm this distinction. (Deane 1990: 275)

Atlas, the Greek god who held the world on his shoulders, is another important presence in Heaney's poetry. He symbolizes, as opposed to the earthy renewal and regeneration represented by Antaeus, the earthy yoke, the sometimes encumbering misfortune of over-rootedness. The god explicitly appears, for example, in 'Anything Can Happen', Heaney's translation of ode 1, 34 by Horace:⁶ "Ground gives. The heaven's weight / Lifts up off Atlas like a kettle lid" (2004: 11, vv. 13–14). In the original ode, human shiver provoked by Jupiter's thunder and the shaking of *terra tremens* (as opposed to *terra firma*), there is no more than a reference to the *Atlantic* (on which the etymology of Atlas stands his ground). However, the poet declares having taking the freedom to add a new stanza (as well as to omit the first one from the

⁵ I do not quite agree with this binary opposition between earth and air in Heaney's poetry. I would rather highlight the tension, dialectics and search for balance between these two centralising symbols throughout Heaney's literary career. For more information on such issue, see Ráez Padilla (2007).

⁶ Heaney wrote this translation after the terrorist attacks in New York on 11 September 2001. It was first published in *The Irish Times* on 17 November of that same year.

Latin version) taking Atlas a reference point (2004: 19). This proves the relevance in Heaney's poetics of this classical figure, who is already present in the 1966 poem about 'Antaeus': "Let each new hero [i.e., Hercules] come / Seeking the golden apples and Atlas" (1975: 3, vv. 13–14).

These classical gods and heroes, nevertheless, are not just erudite, scholarly references in Heaney's works. In my opinion, they shape different symbolic systems in what I have termed elsewhere, following Gaston Bachelard's nomenclature, *symbolic complexes*. Thus, we can distinguish a *symbolic complex of Antaeus* which includes all the positive, regenerative values of the earth, whereas, on the other hand, the *symbolic complex of Atlas* contains the encumbering gravity of the earth. As an example, I will briefly comment on a significant poem with regard to these symbolic complexes: 'The Gravel Walks'.

Hoard and praise the verity of gravel.
Gems for the undeluded. Milt of earth.

[...]

But the actual washed stuff kept you slow and steady
As you went stooping with your barrow full
Into an absolution of the body,
The shriven life tired bones and marrow feel.
(1996: 39–40, vv. 17–18, 25–28)

As can be seen, gravel is wealth, truth. It is inside all of us (1996: 39, v. 22), writes Heaney. It is a treasure the poet *hoards* (note the connotation of worship in the verb). However, too much gravel "kept you slow and steady" (v. 25), it chains you to a heavy barrow of earthy riches which forces you to stoop along the way. The poem, therefore, is a clear example of the regenerative value of the earth, on the one hand; on the other hand, a warning of its motionless gravity. An ode to Antaeus' firm stride; an elegy to Atlas, a petrified pillar.

But not only would I like to concentrate on providing some connections between myth and poetry in Heaney's work on imaginative or inspirational terms, as I think the presence of classical mythology in his last book collections serves a much more ideologically-driven purpose. Before dealing with this idea, I would like to point out an allegorical appreciation on the part of W. B. Yeats which has very

much to do with Heaney's overall mythological system: Yeats considered Irish civilization superior to English, as Greek was superior to Roman. In fact, as the Hellenistic civilization fell prey to the colonizing power of Rome, it was the culture of the Aegean which, nonetheless, was absorbed by the colonizers and thus perpetuated. Yeats envisaged the poetic potentiality of this allegory, which offered a consoling parallel to the history of colonization suffered by the Irish. Thus, he equated the Celts with the Greeks, in an attempt to remove Irish culture from the periphery imposed by colonization. He quite succeeded in doing so, and, as Seamus Heaney said in his lecture delivered in the University of A Coruña (Spain) when receiving there the degree of *Doutor Honoris Causa* in 2000, "by the late 1890s wherever Yeats sat was [...] the head of the table" (2000: 34).⁷ Following Yeats' equation of the Irish with the Greeks, Heaney has also overtly acknowledged that he has often adopted Greek themes for the same reason, that is, "a desire to relocate the centre of the universe at the centre of my own home ground" (2000: 36). Hence the outstanding presence of Greece in his latest poetry. In *The Spirit Level* (1996), curiously enough, the Irish poet strategically places at the centre of the volume the sequence 'Mycenae Lookout', a poetic rendering of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* whose internecine violence offers a clear parallelism with the civil war in Northern Ireland. Likewise, in his following collection of poems, *Electric Light* (2001), we also find six 'Sonnets from Hellas' positioned at the centre of the book. The formal layout of these two recent volumes offers us, then, a peculiar regularity confirming the centrality of Greek leitmotifs in his work, with which Heaney tries to liberate his Irish psyche from any kind of marginality.

On some occasions relocation of the centre is grasped by Heaney through linguistic epiphany. One the Irish poet has frequently referred to is the Greek word *omphalos*. In his autobiographical essay "Mossbawn" Heaney recollects to this purpose a water pump outside the door of the farmhouse where he grew up, whose sound was one of the first sounds he ever heard, and one that he kept hearing all through his rural childhood whenever someone worked its handle. "*Omphalos*, *omphalos*, *omphalos*" was that sound, "its blunt and falling music" (1980: 17) blurring the peripheral existence of the poet. In fact, the word *omphalos* is the name of the stone that stood in the sanctuary of

⁷ For more information on Yeats and Heaney see Sailer (1993).

Apollo in Delphi, marking the centre, the navel of the whole Greek world. "That pump", writes Heaney, "marked an original descent into earth, sand, gravel, water. It centred and staked the imagination, made its foundation the foundation of the *omphalos* itself" (ib. 20). Curiously enough, James Joyce also recurs on several occasions to this centralising symbol in *Ulysses*. "Billy Pitt had them built [...] when the French were on the sea. But ours is the *omphalos*",⁸ answers Buck Mulligan when Haines asks him about the Martello tower. Or when, in chapter 14, Mulligan proposes to set up "a national fertilising farm to be named Omphalos".⁹ As in the case of Joyce and Yeats, Heaney deploys here the Greek theme in order to overcome periphery, this little epiphany being the sole linguistic instrument with which the poet reconstructs his personal and poetic identity at the very centre of the universe. As the poet himself has declared, "a single word helped to change the order in which my life existed" (2000: 36).

Omphalos and its symbology represents, therefore, a mythological link between the classical world and the rural, isolated, peripheral world of the farm *Mossbawn* in County Derry, where young Heaney was brought up. The poet's attraction for underworld deliquescence and its centralising function in Heaney's particular mytho-poetics is prominent since his early poems. "As a child, they could not keep me from wells / and old pumps with buckets and windlasses", Heaney declares in the poem 'Personal Helicon' (1966: 46, vv. 1–2). The very title of this poem shows that water, wells, pumps, together with mud, bogs, all these symbols at the base of Heaney's amphibious protomatter, connecting the world with the underworld, earth with water, are from early days for Heaney his source of inspiration, his Irish *omphalos*, his *personal helicon*. It is worth noting that *Helicon* was the name of a mountain in Boeotia, famous in Greek mythology because two springs sacred to the Muses (Aganippe and Hipocrenne) were located there. That is why the name of the mountain is usually used in an allusive way to refer to poetic inspiration (*OED*, 2001). Again, another Greek leitmotif to characterize Heaney's personal and familiar remembrances from rural childhood, a centralizing mytho-symbolism rooting Northern Irish personal experiences in the classical literary tradition. The poem 'Mycenae Lookout' mentioned above, an impressive sequence on

⁸ Joyce, James, *Ulysses*, Kessinger Publishing, p. 21.

⁹ *Id.*, p. 463. Other appearances of *omphalos* in *Ulysses*: pp. 7, 46.

fratricide “not only in Troy, or Mycenae [...], but far beyond in time and space” (Jenkins 1996: 11), also abounds in water imagery, wells, pumps, recollecting young Heaney’s own water pump at the farmyard and the centralizing echo of the word *omphalos*. Through symbolic and mythological association, then, Heaney binds together Athens and *Mossbawn*, Greek and Irish, emerging from the same core

like discharged soldiers testing the safe ground,

finders, keepers, seers of fresh water
in the bountiful round mouths of iron pumps
and gushing taps.

(1996: 37, ll. 33–36)

Whether it comes down to the theme of violence with which I began my paper (as can be seen in ‘Mycenae Lookout’), or to Heaney’s own internal tensions which are akin to some of the gods and heroes mentioned above, it seems clear that classical mythology plays a predominant role in Heaney’s poetry, particularly in his latest collections, allowing his verse to oscillate between the particularization of Northern Irish reality and the universalising, centralising halo of classical myth. Hans Osterwalder, for example, notes about *The Spirit Level* (1996): “Greek mythology surfaces as a symbolic enlargement with the purpose of universalising the particular experience of a poet who grew up in Northern Ireland” (1997: 32). The classical myth, all in all, has contributed to de-marginalize Heaney’s peripheral existence as a Northern Irish writer and to come to terms with Ireland’s history of colonization. As in the case of old Greece and Rome, countercultural redress might have just as well taken place. In fact, we can assert that Heaney’s impact in Britain was immediate, so that practically from his first collection of poems in 1966 (*Death of a Naturalist*), published (as well as the rest of his literary production) by London-based *Faber and Faber*, the Northern Irish poet has established himself within mainstream poetry written in English. His success gained him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995, “for works of lyrical beauty and ethical depth, which exalt *everyday* miracles and the living *past*” (the

emphasis is mine)¹⁰. Writing *somewhere* and *everywhere, now* and *then*, is a difficult task that not all writers achieve with the same degree of acceptance and recognition. It seems clear that Seamus Heaney's endeavour to root the Greek *omphalos* at Mossbawn, after all, was not in vain.

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¹⁰ See press release by the Swedish Academy, 5 October 1995: http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1995/press.html (31/01/08).

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Alice Notley's Mythic Descent/Dissent

H. L. HIX

The myth of descent pervades western discourse, appearing already in ancient stories, as when Gilgamesh seeks Utnapishtim and when Odysseus consults the shade of Tiresias, entering Christian mythology as Christ's harrowing of hell, forming in medieval times the architecture of *Beowulf* and of Dante's *Inferno*, and informing such modernist literary works as T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. To extra-literary culture it contributes such common metaphors as descent into poverty, descent into illness, descent into despair, and descent into madness. Alice Notley, a contemporary American poet who lives in Paris, drew on the myth of descent in her 1996 book-length poem *The Descent of Alette*. Notley's poem has a dual aspect: viewed as plot, Alette's descent is a journey, and viewed as character, her descent is a metamorphosis. This dual aspect, the ability of either plot or character to bind the reader's gestalt, enables myth to critique both itself and the society in which it originates, thus enabling Alette's *descent* to be also an act of *dissent*.

1. Elements

Though the relations between literary categories in contemporary usage do not precisely match those that held in classical Greece, Aristotle's identification of the elements of tragedy offers a useful hermeneutic tool in regard not only to tragedy per se, but to all varieties of *mythos* – what a contemporary speaker of English might call “narrative.” Aristotle spells out the elements early in his *Poetics*. Only his identifying the quality of tragedy (it is mimetic, imitating actions performed by agents, good and bad) and the purpose of tragedy (it

produces a purging of pity and fear) precede his enumeration of the six main elements, which guide the rest of the *Poetics*.

From most important to least, the elements are: *plot* (the combination of incidents); *character* (agents' moral purpose, what they seek or avoid); *thought* (what is shown in what the characters say); *diction* (the composition of the verses); *melody* (the tune to which the words are sung); and *spectacle* (the visual accompaniments of the performance, e.g. stage setting). The elements, Aristotle says, have an order of importance. Thought, diction, melody, and spectacle all serve plot and character, which themselves have a hierarchy – plot is more important – but are related inextricably. Plot, which consists in the protagonist's "passing by a series of probable or necessary stages from misfortune to happiness, or from happiness to misfortune" (1463), is best when it features a Discovery, "a change from ignorance to knowledge, and thus to either love or hate, in the personages marked for good or evil fortune" (1465). Quality of plot and quality of character, in other words, are linked. External events and internal states reflect (on) one another. The best tragic plots will be about "a man not preeminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by some error of judgment" (1467).

Though Aristotle never says so, one reason for the primacy of plot and character is their ability to deliver a gestalt. In any poem or narrative, the reader is tasked to arrive at some gestalt, some sense of the work as a whole. The other elements raise *why* questions that plot and character answer. Thought might ask why Antigone buries Polyneices and Eteocles; plot answers, because they were left unburied by Creon, and character, because Antigone is courageous. Spectacle asks why Antigone kneels when she buries Polyneices and Eteocles; plot answers, because she will later refuse to kneel before Creon, and character, because it reveals her reverence. The gestalt offered by plot and character, though, begs to be something more than the background facts, the story line, what Mieke Bal calls the "fabula," which is why a narrative such as *The Descent of Alette* resists simplifying summary. The back-cover description on Notley's book ("... a feminist epic, a bold journey into the deeper realms...") is profoundly inadequate to the poem. The richness of *The Descent of Alette*, as of any poem or narrative that bears scrutiny, derives in part from the fact that, because plot and character are reciprocal, a gestalt adequate to the text would

need to account not only for plot or character separately, but also for their reciprocity.

2. Plot

As plot, a descent is a specific type of journey, the metaphysic of which is pessimistic. By a pessimistic metaphysic, I mean that, whether the protagonist overcomes or is overcome by her environment – whether she wins or loses, lives or dies – the forces of that environment are dark, and arrayed against her. (As compared to an ascent, a pilgrim's progress, in which the forces are ultimately benevolent.) The four books into which *The Descent of Alette* is divided correspond to the four stages of Alette's journey. In Book One, Alette passes through a subway system, and in Book Two through a network of caves. In Book Three she goes to a lake and meadow, and Book Four has her in the house of "the tyrant."

The first line of the first section of the first book of the poem places Alette within a journey, one that allusion to Dante tags as mythic. <"One day, I awoke" "& found myself on" "a subway, endlessly">. Alette professes not to know <"how I'd arrived there or" "who I was" "exactly">, though she does recognize herself as within a plot: <"... I knew the train" "knew riding it">. She is also already aware, even within that first section, of the existence of "the tyrant," and his role as <"a man in charge of" "the fact" "that we were" / "below the ground" "endlessly riding" "our trains, never surfacing"> (3); through that awareness, the reader is initiated into the poem's pessimistic metaphysic, divining already that the forces of Alette's environment are dark.

During her time on the subway, Alette becomes increasingly preoccupied with the tyrant. She receives conflicting accounts of his nature and identity, which she must try to sort out. The accounts, all fragmentary, include events attributed to the tyrant's personal history, as when Alette is told that once, <" 'years ago, the tyrant" "was shot"> (22). They also include sweeping statements about the tyrant's character and powers, as when Alette is told that <"The tyrant" "owns form"> (25). Alette understands that the tyrant is connected to her own situation in a deeply problematic way, and suffers <"Despair & outrage"> as she realizes the equivalence of her riding a <"mechanical

contrivance" "in the darkness"> and her being steeped in <"the authority" // "of" "another's mind" "the tyrant's mind"> (4). But she also understands that such connection to the tyrant – being steeped in the authority of his mind – implies also a different kind of connection, a form of solidarity, with others. Alette accepts and shares the point of view she is presented with by another subway passenger, that the passengers' fates cannot be separated: <"I can't leave it [the subway]" "ever" "unless" / "we all leave – ' "> (21). That collective fate is governed by the laws of the inverted, subterranean world through which Alette journeys. <"We can only go" "down" "farther down – ">, Alette is told. <"Down" "is now the only way" "to rise"> (26).

However, Alette does not trust all the reports she receives about the tyrant. On one occasion, presented with a "ghoulish" man as the tyrant, she sees through the deception. <"He's not the tyrant"> she tells the man who presents the ghoulish figure to her, <"He's a simple // ghoul" "The tyrant" "is a mild-" "looking man" "He does not show" / "his decay" "He has no such grace," "you might say" "His sense of" / "his own knowledge" "presumed rightness" "preserves him" "forever"> (32). The tyrant, though, will not be easily mastered, nor his disguises all easily seen through. Soon after Alette's dismissal of the ghoulish man, she encounters a friendly-looking old man, whose cheek she pats. She has been talking to another man, who at that moment, in identifying the tyrant to her, delineates explicitly for the first time in the poem the quest Alette must undertake: <"The man said," " 'You've just patted' "the cheek of" / "the man" "you must confront" "& vanquish" "> (33). Alette receives her formal charge in the next section, from a huge owl that visits the car in which Alette is riding. <"I've come here" "to say" "that when you finally" "meet with / the tyrant – " "do you know yet" "you must confront him?" ">. Alette asks what she is being charged to do, and is told that the tyrant must die. <" 'Die?'>, she objects,

I can't kill someone" "I can't kill," "I have no right" " " "You are an animal," said the owl," " 'an animal' "as I am" "Act like an animal" "when you kill him" "As little" "as possible" "must happen" "It must be clean" (34).

Her task has been presented as it would be presented in Greek epic, by a god in the shape of an animal (Athena often takes the shape specifically of an owl), and that avatar promises to help the protagonist

through a conflict that otherwise exceeds the mortal's resources. Unlike the heroes in the *Iliad*, though, who vaunt their prowess, Alette is self-effacing. <" 'I have no prowess,' I said"> (34).

Book One ends with the train's dissolution: <"Its sides fall away" "I am floating" "There is / nothing" "but the dark" "everywhere" "around me"> (42). Book Two opens with Alette reporting that <"I floated" "down in darkness" "among" "the other bodiless" / "people" "from the black train"> (45), until eventually <"I lost sense of other presences," "felt nearly" "non- / existent">, but saw a mountain in the distance, and headed <"for the mountain" "in a gradual" "downward arc – "> (46). Alette finds herself in <"a cave that was" "a sort of" "antechamber"> with a door <"which seemed to lead towards other caves"> (47). Seeking orientation from the "maintenance man" who is there, she is given an imperative. <" 'Can you tell me" "more clearly" // "what these caves are?">, Alette asks. He replies,

'I can't be that clear:" "But they are something like" "our middle depths" "or middle psyche, if you prefer" "You must pass through them" ("though not through all of them – " "by any means") "on your way to" "your deepest origin" "Now get on with" "your journey' (47).

Which Alette does, stepping through the door into the next cave.

Neither her early disclaimer of prowess nor her reticence about killing the tyrant implies a lack of courage or will. As the struggle with the tyrant intensifies, so does Alette's commitment. She does not allow herself to be cowed by the tyrant. At one point during her passage through the caves, a portrait of the tyrant comes alive and speaks to her, charging her, <" 'Don't walk through" "the tunnel">, and threatening her, <"At the end of / it" "you will die">. Her reply, far from timid or acquiescent, is defiant. <" 'This tunnel" "represents" / "my whole journey, doesn't it?" " – I called back to" "the tyrant" // " 'Well I'm going to" "see it through' "> (59).

Seeing the journey through depends sometimes on agency (as it will ultimately in the killing of the tyrant), but sometimes on patience. When she enters a cave <"whose walls closed up" "around me," "until" / "it became" "exactly my size, my body's size">, Alette's response is not to struggle against the entrapment – though it last forever – but to observe a small turquoise blue salamander that climbs onto her

shoulder, to feel the hollow shiver it provokes, and finally to fall asleep. The map onto which she falls in her dream becomes <"a field of" "snow at night" // "cold & cleansing">, and Alette awakens, restored: <"my room was larger," / "had a door &" "I was plural," "was others," "was my companions" "again"> (61).

Though one purpose of her journey (killing the tyrant) has been imposed on her, Alette also maintains a self-imposed purpose. She is looking (as she tells a snake she encounters along the way) for <"A lost" "first mother," "an Eve / unlike Eve," "or anyone" "whose name we know" ">. In that search, she attends to the environment through which the journey takes her. She chose to ask the snake, she tells it, <"since what these caves do" "is know;" / "& you are in one" ">. Alette's attention in this case is rewarded by the clue that a depiction of the snake <" 'will help you find her," "when the time comes"> (76).

Maintaining her own purpose for the journey does not relieve Alette of the imposed purpose, which she does not try to escape: <" 'I will / do it,' I said" " 'You want me, don't you," "to kill the tyrant?" // "I will kill him">. She knows, though, that <"...it won't happen" "quite yet"> because <"I have to / journey first" "farther down" "into this darkness" "> (80). Continuing her journey, Alette leaves the caves, following a voice that instructs her to keep walking through a long corridor. She walks, <"surmising" "that I was about" "to exit" "this whole system" // "of caves"> (82). She descends a staircase, mysteriously lit so that only the steps directly in front of her are visible. The staircase empties onto a riverbank at night, and Alette follows the voice's reiterated instruction to keep walking. <"I walked to" / "the river's edge," "took off my shoes," "left them there" // "Began to wade" "into the water"> (82) that defines the geography of Book Three.

After crossing a river, passing through woods, and visiting a meadow, Alette is led by her owl guide to a gazebo at the edge of a lake. She asks him what lake it is, and he answers, <" 'I find it difficult" / "to define" "It is the center" "of the deep..." "Of this underworld, / I guess">. Pursuing the question, Alette receives another affirmation that the topos through which she journeys is simultaneously an outer and an inner landscape. <" 'How deep is it?' I asked" " 'Infinitely" "deep,' he said" " 'It // connects with" "the great darkness," "connects with" "one's death - ' "> (105). Only after death - she is eaten by the owl - and receipt of a "death body" is Alette led to the tyrant's house by the owl. She climbs up through a hole into the

basement, and the owl leaves her there; he descends again, and leaves her to rise.

Alette meets the tyrant immediately upon entering his house, but long dialogue precedes the actual physical conflict through which Alette kills him. He warns her that he is <"not vulnerable" "at all,"> and indeed claims <" 'I'm not even' 'a real person' ">. He feigns puzzlement – <"You didn't" "really think" "you could kill me," "just // kill me?"> – and laughs at her, then becomes almost cordial. <" 'Come tour' "my house with me,' / he said" " 'You can't kill me;" "so join me" "for now""> (123).

The final act of the journey as plot is to remind us of the journey as character. Alette's journey through the world transforms the very world through which she journeys. When she returns to the world above the subway, the street is <"filling up" "with people"> who <"...knew he must be dead"> and stand <"...staring into" "the clear air:">. They see a <"jeweled blue"> sky, and know that they can now have <"...infinity" "in our lives">. As a result of Alette's descent, <"The light has been made new' "> (147).

3. Character

As plot, descent is a journey; as character, descent is a metamorphosis, a change of internal state that expresses itself outwardly. (As compared to an ascent, which is a miracle, a change of external conditions that renews the inner person.) In the course of her journey, Alette undergoes a series of metamorphoses that sum to one large-scale metamorphosis, the realization of freedom that is the equivalent of her fulfilling the quest. As journey, Alette escapes from physical confinement (herself, and also releases others); as metamorphosis, Alette is spiritually liberated (and liberates others).

The journey is a quest to alter a bad state of affairs – to kill the tyrant – so the metamorphoses are often modes of resistance to the current state. In the section beginning <"A woman came into" "a car I rode"> (11), for instance, the metamorphosis that Alette observes (rather than undergoing herself) is illegal. The woman begins stripping for money, and as she takes off her blouse,

her face" "began to change" "Grew feathers, a small beak" "& by the time she was naked," "she wore the head" "of an eagle" "a crowned eagle" "a raptor" "herself – ""And as she stood" "& faced the car" "her body" "was changing"

"was becoming entirely" "that bird" "those wings,

but the authorities intervene. <"A cop came" / "As if ready" "as if they knew" "Her wings were clipped," // "talons cut" "as if as quickly as possible">. The woman's illegal metamorphosis into an eagle presages Alette's own metamorphosis into an owl, which will allow Alette to kill the tyrant in Book Four.

If the tyrant, viewed through plot, is the object of Alette's journey, he is also, viewed through character, the occasion of at least some of her metamorphoses. For example, in the section beginning <"I entered" "a car"> (12), Alette observes the tyrant in ghostly form encasing many of the other passengers in her subway car, and then he begins to encase her, causing a metamorphosis she has to resist.

He sank down" "into my head" "into my thoughts,"
"which instantly" "separated" "assumed a terrifying"
"strict order" "unfamiliar" "to me" "Each felt distinct"
"from each," "arranged" "in a progression" "My head"
"contained an army" "of separate" "same-shape
thoughts"

which Alette resists in part because <"No thought felt true">. Eventually, she <"cast him off"> – refused the metamorphosis – and fled.

The connection between journey and metamorphosis is especially explicit in the transition from Book One to Book Two. As journey, <"This particular" "train" "will leave the subway" / "for another," "deeper," "unilluminated place," "where all is" / "uncharted"> (41); as metamorphosis, <"All will" "become a darkness" "in which each of you" "will also / lose form">. As the train pulls away, Alette's questions reveal concerns about both plot and character: <"Where" "are we going?" "Will I be there?" "Who am I now?"> (42).

That the metamorphoses Alette undergoes are physical manifestations of spiritual conditions is often made explicit, as on the occasion

when Alette notices that a small drop of a white substance she identifies as evil <"oozed" "from my palm">. Alette connects the white substance to war, and disclaims complicity with it. <" 'I've never" "been to war" "I've never" "been allowed" // "to participate" "in the decision to go to war – ">, she protests. <" 'I've done nothing,' I said" " 'Has someone" "such power" // "as to make his sin" "ooze from my pores?" "> (51).

The metamorphoses also occur as literalizings of identification with others. At one point during her time in the caves in Book Two, Alette stands before three paintings painted onto the cave walls, one of them a portrait of a nude woman with a black hole where her face should be. Alette feels herself becoming the woman. <"I began to weep – ">, she says.

"a pressure" "from this speeding-up" "of time" "seemed to squeeze tears" "from my eyes" "I wasn't" "sad inside," "but I wept & wept" "A roaring" "sucking wind" "began blowing" "all around me" "The room darkened," "I stood suddenly" "inside the" "painted woman," "stood nude inside" "her dark facelessness" (59).

So complete is Alette's identification with the woman that <"I had" "become her">.

In the next cave she visits, Alette is again metamorphosed, this time not through purity of identification, but through division. In this cave, <"...I instantly" "divided into three" / "separate" "figures," "chained together" "in single file">. This metamorphosis is temporal. When she asks <" 'Why are there three of me" "in here?">, she is (they are) told <" 'You are your" "Past, Present," "& Future">. A man gives her this information, but by the end of the poem she has reversed the situation and is teaching him. He asks if she is going forward, and warns her that death lies ahead. She is not intimidated. <" 'Any woman" "may already" "be dead," "> she tells him, explaining (through the "someone else" whose voice speaks through her): <"No remembrance" "of our mother" / "No remembrance" "of who we really are" "Thus a woman" "may be" / "already dead" "born dead"> (60).

We might expect metamorphoses to function metaphorically or allegorically, but the section beginning <"I entered" "a cave"> (68) shows the ease with which the metamorphoses in *The Descent of Alette*

also works allusively. Alette enters into a conversation with a woman who has turned into rock. The woman's complaint is of the violence of patriarchal power structures, and the section manages, without making any allusion explicit, to allude to Plato's allegory of the cave (by the location of the conversation), the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial in Washington, D.C. (<" 'We'll carve" "his name," / she said," " 'into a wall" "where there are so" "many names">), Michelangelo's "Pietà," and by extension other artists' pietàs, and by further extension the gospel narratives of Christ's burial. Such allusive metamorphosis does not exclude metaphorical or allegorical metamorphosis, another example of which occurs just three pages later, when another woman turns into stone, but this time in such a way that she <"became" "herself cavelike">, freezing <"into a model of" / "caves like the caves" "we stood in">, and leading Alette to fear that <"...I stood" "exactly" "inside of" "women's bodies"> and to ask <"Was"/ "the human psyche" "made of women" "turned to stone?..."> (71).

Change can be simple and the source of hope, as when Alette reports that <"I was alone" "Myself &" "alone" "Yet emptied" "of much, it seemed" / "I felt unburdened" "& even buoyant"> (86). It can also be complex and the cause of fear, as when Alette meets a headless woman who asks her to sit <"for a minute" "enjoying this night" / "before we change" "Change forever" ">. When Alette reunites the woman's head to her body, she (the woman) becomes the first mother: <"her face" "began to change" / "Color" "poured into it">, she became younger than Alette <"& yet she was, I felt," "truly" "our mother..."> (98). Alette's own metamorphoses and those of the other presences are not random and isolated, but interconnected and recursive. The formerly headless woman returns soon, <"as a spirit" "with a snake's" // "lower body">, and enters Alette through her mouth, after which Alette dreams she floats in air, and awakens in <"a new clearing," / "brightly lit"> (100). Each metamorphosis prepares for the next. After the owl eats her, Alette asks how it is that she is not dead, and is told that <"parts of your insubstantial / body - " "have been" "replaced" "The owl replaced them">. Your eyes, the voice tells her, <"are now like" "an owl's eyes"> and <" 'Your vagina is // white bone">; <"You are now equipped">, Alette is assured, <"to experience" "what you need"> (109).

Told that in the tyrant's world, what she will need is to fly alone, Alette asks, <" 'I will fly?'>. The owl assures her that <" 'You are

owl,'> (117), a metamorphosis that indeed proves necessary. At one point while walking with the tyrant Alette is invited to cross over a stretch of abandoned subway track covered with rats. It is too far for her to simply step or leap over, but she successfully crosses, and when she reaches the other side the tyrant tells her <“ ‘You became an owl,’ “>; <“ ‘For an instant,” “a brief instant,” “you looked like” // “an owl’s shadow” “& you flew” “You flew across” “> (131).

The poem's final metamorphosis is not one Alette experiences, but one she accomplishes. As a result of Alette's killing the tyrant, another woman is able to fold his body into <“a small square shape”> that she simply lays aside, and those who have been underground are freed to return to the light: <“all the // lost creatures” “began to” “emerge” “Come up from” “below the subway” / “From the caves &” “from the dark woods” “I had visited”>. At the book's conclusion, a utopian unity and inclusion is achieved, at least briefly. <“Whatever,” “whoever,” “could be,” “was possible,” “or / had been” “forgotten” “for long ages” “now joined us,” “now / joined us once more,” “Came to light” “that morning”> (148).

In her “Author's Note,” Notley claims bluntly that “I am not Alette.” But even so apparently simple a statement might have more than one meaning, and the statement does not mean that Alette has a singular identity distinct from Notley's. It means that Alette is not only Notley, but also the rest of us, Notley herself included. Notley does not stand for us all, but Alette does. She is an *ethos* (Aristotle's word for “character”) rather than a human individual, and her metamorphoses belong to Notley no more nor less than they do to others.

4. Critique

It would be impossible even to flip through the pages of *The Descent of Alette* without noticing the plethora of quotation marks. Every line in the nearly 150 pages of poetry is broken into shorter phrases by quotation marks. Notley's “Author's Note” at the beginning of the book gives a rationale. “[T]hey're there, mostly,” Notley says of the quotation marks, “to measure the poem.” The end of the author's note asserts the poem's narrativity: “this is not a thought, or a record of thought-process, this is a story, told” (v). By juxtaposing a statement of the poem's subjection to measurement with a claim for the poem's

narrative status, Notley raises a question: why must this story (why might any story) be measured in the telling? Notley's answer in the author's note has to do with pace and distance. "The quotation marks make the reader slow down and silently articulate – not slur over mentally – the phrases at the pace, and with the stresses, I intend. They also distance the narrative from myself, the author" (v). Though the rationale Notley offers is not *wrong*, neither is it exhaustive. At least one other aspect of the quotation marks is that they function as scare quotes, implicitly qualifying and "ironicizing" the poem. In this way they are of a piece with the poem's critical posture.

"To measure the poem" is not for Notley a dislocated or arbitrary ideal. Aristotle's identification of the elements of tragedy is for him one step in an argument for tragedy's superiority over epic, and Notley's sense of measure in *The Descent of Alette* is one part of the book's appeal to, and simultaneous critique of, epic. In "Homer's *Art*," a short essay included in the volume that gave *The Descent of Alette* its initial publication, Notley identifies measure as crucial to Homer. "Homer's *Art*," Notley contends, "is to tell a public story, in a measure that makes that possible," that offers "a pleasure in the music as the truth of its telling," so that "as the story is told in this measure it becomes really true – the measure draws from the poet depths of thought & feeling, as well as memory" (*Grave of Light*, 186–87). This observation about measure leads Notley through a chain of ideas to what might be taken as a statement of purpose for *Alette*. Homer's stories are "stories for men about a male world," and helped establish as "the epitome of achievement in Western poetry" the epic, a "large long story" about a war, written by men who "have tended, or tried, to be near the center of the politics of their time, court or capital" (187).

So what, Notley asks, happens if one is a woman and "someone you know dies many years after the Vietnam War" (our "strange faraway but shattering" equivalent of the Trojan War)? "To tell that story, which is both personal & very public, you might distance it from yourself, somehow, & find a sound for it – as the Greeks did – that makes your telling of it listenable to & true" (187). That gendered/political ideal has a corresponding aesthetic ideal: "What a service to poetry it might be to steal story away from the novel & give it back to rhythm & sound, give it back to the line" (188). Writing in the direction of those ideals, "a long poem, a story poem, with a female narrator/hero" might help to recover "some sense of what mind was like before Homer, before the

world went haywire & women were denied participation in the design & making of it," might even help someone to "discover that original mind inside herself now, in these times" (188). Just such a service to poetry – a critical service, a critique both of epic itself and of the society in which it originates – does Notley seek to perform. *The Descent of Alette* participates in what Miriam Cooke describes as a broader literary and cultural questioning of the narrative valorizing of war and masculinity: "there is no one history," Cooke contends, "no one story about war, that has greater claim to truth." Instead, "history is made up of multiple stories, many of them herstories" (Cooke 1996: 4). *The Descent of Alette* is one such herstory.

"Homer's *Art*" is followed in *Grave of Light* by "Mother Mask," a short poem introducing a character to whom Alette is allied. Alette might be construed as fulfilling the plea with which "Mother Mask" ends:

Mother Mask, you must
change us, by speaking our old new selves
Mother Mask open your set wooden mouth
Please open your carved wooden protruding
live dead mouth & let your green
bronze dark light skin shimmer with
life death, close your open eyes & close open
your mouth & be dumb speak to us
be still sing to us, tell us an old old new one
an old new story truth lie of our own life deaths
our peace wars, tell us our own old story we don't
know it any more, haven't had a
Mother, a Mask Mother, a wood real
mother for forever (189–90).

In this way page 73 of *The Descent of Alette* represents the effect of the quotation marks. When the speaker says <"Phrases" "were repeated," "almost sung, / choruslike">, that might be a way to speak of the effect of the quotation marks. A phrase sung, rather than read, becomes choruslike, in the sense of the ancient Greek chorus. This poem, <"I found" "a room of voices" "It was a cave of" "small containers">, is mythic like the rest of *The Descent of Alette*. The small containers each containing a voice <"which emerged in" "a line of white smoke" / "& spoke" "in midair"> lead to the larger container: <"It was a black urn"

"& its voice arose" "in a gray / smoke" "It spoke" "in a rich" "female whisper:">. So it becomes like the Delphic Oracle, another female voice arising from the earth with a rich female whisper, and uttering oracular pronouncements, in Notley's case <"Don't guard" "your footsteps" "I will protect you" // "I always do" "Don't" "protect yourself, I" "will protect you">. Notley's speaker asks all the voices, not only the voice from the black urn, to say <"Whatever" "is frozen" "will now melt">, and the voices do say, as the speaker requested, <"It will melt" "it will melt now" "will melt," they" "began to chorus" / " 'Whatever's frozen" "will now melt..." ">.

Chorus and oracle alike raise the stakes for the gestalt. They are, to use Charles Bernstein's term, "anti-absorptive," establishing ironic distance and resistance. They link plot and character (external and internal, journey and metamorphosis), establishing their reciprocity. The oracle is divine, but must be divined. The chorus recognizes that knowledge of the course of events does not untie that course from character. Notley's quotation marks, decidedly anti-absorptive, invest the poem with the same ironic distance and resistance. What Notley calls measure is the reciprocity of plot and character; it raises the stakes for the gestalt by distinguishing the parts more fully, thus making the assembly of the whole more dramatic.

Assembly of the whole, after all, is needed. Plot cannot be adequate in itself. I have completed my journey (made my million bucks, won fame, bought that BMW); so what? Without a change of internal state, the external events have no meaning. Similarly, character cannot be adequate in itself. I found inner peace, but orphans still suffer in Sudan. Without a change in external events, internal change has no value. Plot and character critique each other, and complement each other: change in the external shows the inadequacy of, and the need for, change in the internal, and vice versa.

One human project, then, is to invite such reciprocity – simultaneous critique and complementarity – between the enclosed self (one's character, one's internal state) and the porous self (one's journey, one's effects on/in the world). "Paradox and irony," to borrow Michael Hamburger's formulation, "are no longer the clowning of a divided self; they have become part of a vision of human existence as a whole" (Hamburger 1982: 56), individual existence and collective existence alike. Narrative is a mode of invitation to such reciprocity, an act of assent and dissent alike. Alice Notley's Alette ascends and

assents only after (and because) she descends and dissents, invoking a myth to reiterate the human.

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The Modern Adaptation of the Orpheus Myth in the Poetry of Venó Taufer¹

MATEVŽ KOS

In Greek legend Orpheus is a pre-Homeric poet, said to have lived before the Trojan War. His story is well known from the Roman poets Virgil and Ovid, who have contributed to Orpheus' standing as a source of inspiration for many authors and works of world literature and other arts, from the opera to, for example, painting (cf. Frenzel 1992: 603–608). Slovenian literature is no exception. The earliest vestiges of classical myth may be discerned even in the folk poetry of the Early and High Middle Ages and in ecclesiastical literature from the 16th to

¹ Venó Taufer (b. in 1933 in Ljubljana) is a poet, essayist, translator. Editor of the literary magazine *Review 57* (*Revija 57*) until it was banned in 1959, Taufer was also the manager of the experimental theatre group *Oder 57*. For many years he worked as a journalist (BBC-London, Ljubljana) before founding and directing the International Literary Festival *Vilenica* in the early 1980s, which was then in the communist-governed Slovenia understood as an important part of the engagement for democratization. In 1989 Taufer was co-founder of the first Slovenian democratic party and co-author of the 1989 *May Declaration*, the basic document of pluralistic democracy in Slovenia and of its independence. Taufer has published 18 poetry collections. He is also the author of several plays (*Prometheus or The Dark in the Pupil of the Sun*, 1968, and *Odysseus & Son or The World and Home*, 1989, were staged and recognized with numerous awards at international theatre festivals in Grenoble, Milan, Mexico City, Zagreb, Sarajevo, Baden-Baden etc.), books of essays, and numerous theatre reviews. His translations of T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens and Ted Hughes met with high acclaim. In 1996, Taufer won the Great Prešeren Prize for his oeuvre and in 1995 he was awarded a prestigious international Central European Award in Vienna.

the 18th centuries. Subsequently, the reception of Greco-Roman mythology may be traced through the periods of the baroque, enlightenment, and romanticism down to the modern and post-modern Slovenian literature of the 20th and 21st centuries (see Kos 2003). It is no coincidence that it was the key figure of the Slovenian literary canon, the romantic poet France Prešeren, who laid the foundations for the whole subsequent reception of classical myth in Slovenian poetry. The main impulse “given by Prešeren to the Slovenian reception of classical myth has been the subjective appropriation, conversion, and interpretation of the myths – with ever new literary, mental and ideological approaches, to be sure, but always on the basis of identifying a given mythical character or event with the fate of the present-day subject, be it personal or poetic, individual or collective” (ib. 156). If Prešeren’s adaptation of classical characters was marked by their equation “with the full, self-sufficient romantic personal subject”, the modern poets of the second half of the 20th century perceived classical myths, including the Orpheus myth, as stories about the deeper issues of man’s fate. These issues may be summarized in existentialist terms: strangeness, paradox, absurdity, alienation, etc. Prešeren’s *Wreath of Sonnets*, for example, presents Orpheus as a magical singer and as a model for the “national poet”, who should inspire and unite his people – the divided and inwardly riven Slovenians, who still lacked their own nation state in Prešeren’s time, that is, in mid-19th century. More than a century later, the historical situation and *Zeitgeist* had changed, resulting in a fundamentally different image of Orpheus as revealed in the poetry of Slovenian modernists.

One of the key authors of postwar Slovenian modernism in poetry – the so-called “dark modernism” – is Veno Taufer. His first collection of poems, *Leaden Stars*, was published in 1958. When literary historians and interpreters discuss Taufer’s poetry and its beginnings, they discuss it together with the poetry of Dane Zajc (1929–2005) and Gregor Strniša (1930–1987). Like Taufer, both published their first collections of poems at the end of the fifties: Zajc’s *Scorched Grass* was published in the same year as *Leaden Stars*, Strniša’s *Mosaics* the next year.² The

² That Taufer and Zajc had to publish their books as samizdat epitomizes and highlights the literary and particularly the cultural-political situation of the time. It was only Strniša’s book (being superficially a bit more “classical”, and hence more acceptable to the then cultural ideologists, but in fact no less “problematic”) that was allowed to be published by an “official” publishing house.

appearance of the three poets was a significant switchover, especially in the context of the literary trends from 1945 to the end of the fifties, which were to mark Slovenian poetry for the next few decades.

The literary critical assessment of *Leaden Stars* as introducing completely new formal creating principles into Slovenian poetry refers particularly to Taufer's (gradual) abandonment of solid poetic composition and punctuation marks. It points to the fact that Veno Taufer, to repeat the generally accepted evaluation, is one of the beginners (and later one of the main representatives) of modernism in Slovenia. However, the modernist poetics of *Leaden Stars* still intermingles with some more traditional poetic principles. It is influenced by various systems of philosophical thought: from early Marxism to existentialism and the philosophy of the absurd. The romantic disillusionment, expressive pathos, and sentiment still play quite an important part in the poems where the "viewpoint of the narration" is structured by the first-person voice.

A Prisoner of Freedom (1963), Taufer's second collection of poems, is stylistically and thematically clearer. The title *A Prisoner of Freedom* corresponds with existentialist thought, above all with Sartre's famous formulation which claims that man "is condemned to freedom". However, this does not imply that Taufer's second collection of poems merely poeticizes the premises of existentialist philosophy. The language of *A Prisoner of Freedom* is more sophisticated in comparison with *Leaden Stars*; the formerly most noticeable technopoetic feature of Taufer's poetry, the plural voice, hardly ever speaks. The former implicit "socio-critical" (and moral) perspective switches to a detached, impersonal attitude. The poems of *A Prisoner of Freedom*, which are "provocatively" entitled according to the conventionalized romantic tradition (*Love I, A Well, Autumn Poem* ...), aim less at the dialogic and more at an uncompromising reckoning with every present-day romanticizing form or with the aesthetics of "the beautiful and the sublime". *Love* is no redeeming totality but a Rilkean story of two solitudes joined by the anticipation of death; *a well* is no symbol of wisdom or vitality but a bloody abyss; *autumn* is no festival of the earth, serene maturity etc. but merely the time of harsh, almost apodictic "judgement": "the world is built and static" (*Autumn Poem*).

"Poetological" problems and the poet's self-reflection are a significant innovation, introduced by the poem *Orpheus* and then extensively developed by the cycle – more than significantly entitled – *Mute Orpheus*.

The poem *Orpheus* runs as follows:

under a blossoming cherry tree he sings about spring
holds the music upside down in angelic hands
the song is seraphically sad a devilishly funny
women and children watch him without malice

petals flutter down on his brow there's an echo in his head
crows wait for the fruit to ripen
too much spittle in his throat his voice is stifled
already the women and children can feel the seeds in their
teeth

his heart is a bird of prey
it sits on his nose looks in his eyes
cooling his death's sweat with its flapping wings

his heart is a bird of prey
it pecks out his eyes perches in his skull
its claws scratching in the dry remains for moisture

(Taufe 1999: 19) (*translated by Michael Biggins*)

The "poetic awareness" is threatened from two directions: by the experience of silence and of word deficiency on the one hand, turning into a declaration of its own helplessness, and on the other hand by the "outside", social unresponsiveness, which emerges more and more clearly as the historical destiny of modern poetry. The present-day Orpheus renounces any kind of Orphism, and even calls it into question; he is but a pale shadow of the formerly seductive singer ("too much spittle in his throat his voice is stifled") and harmonious musician ("holds the music upside down in angelic hands"). And more: "his heart is a bird of prey / it pecks out his eyes perches in his skull" (*Orpheus*). In one of the poems the poet's principal "organs" are defined as "an eye of eyes which looks into itself and uninterruptedly blindly sees all / a voice alone and lost which can never make itself heard" (*Sea I*). The eye is condemned to blindness, the voice to silence. Such is the destiny of Orpheus under the vaults of "the silent sky", in "the marble silence of the sky" (*A Well*). The silence of the sky is another name for the absent transcendence, for the world of the dead God. Man without any eschatological goals is truly

only a "prisoner of freedom" in the desubstantiated, defocused universum; the logic of "progressing" can only be spirally Eliotean: "beginning with no beginning and without end" (*Sea I*). Or somewhere else: "everyone circles in his own circle" (*Voyages*). Being marked with death, with mortality, is the destiny which basically determines the modes of man's existence and his self-awareness, and is a discernible feature of Taufer's poetry characteristic not only of his early poems, but of his whole oeuvre. And it is not merely about a physical death, about an inexorable cognition that – as Taufer says in one of his interviews – "man's birth is actually his death", and that one's life "is measured by one's death", it is about the distinct position of modern poetry; the "ethics" of its words is determined by recognizing the end of any self-evidence, of national-social purposefulness, of applicability, of availability, of the "spectacular function" of literature.

In *A Prisoner of Freedom* the process of depersonalization, a fundamental constituent of poetic modernity, is already set to work. Taufer is a legitimate heir to, and in Slovenia the most outstanding introducer of, modernity. In his later collections of poems, "the poetics of modernism" becomes increasingly radical. The impersonal form, the semantic ambivalence, reification, the lexical dissonance, fragmentariness, and the compact poetic language which intentionally avoids the immediate verbalization of man's subjectiveness and "mental states" – they all become increasingly explicit through the collections.

Exercises and Assignments (1969), Taufer's third collection, noticeably broadens his poetic horizon. "Social criticism", which was – in the form of moral engagement and serious pathos – only implicitly present in *Leaden Stars*, now returns in the form of a parodic-ironic, even sarcastic, and often polemically oriented attitude to the Slovenian national mythology, as well as – indirectly – to the petty-bourgeois and middle-class jargon of appropriateness, to mediocrity, to empty talk, to conformism etc. This orientation culminates with the cycle *A Church on a Hillock*, which speaks ironically about some typical symbols characteristic of the national and ideological "megastructure" of Slovenianism. In *Exercises and Assignments*, Taufer's poetics is committed to the creation of a new, "non-ideological" language, which is based on the incessant exploration of its own possibilities of expression, on discovering new, as yet un verbalized worlds. Taufer moves a step forward: he subverts the traditional poetic language itself and its ideological structuralization. The voice of *Exercises and Assignments* is not a "critical voice" whose intervention would turn the world's order upside

down. Its position is not central, it loses its own language, solidity, and a recognizable identity. This dispersity is reflected in new poetic methods: an "experiment", a montage, language constructions, a blend of different language levels. Numerous and various literary "references", ranging from quotations, allusions, imitations of older poetic and language forms to stylizations, are of great importance. Taufer exploits different poetic and traditional worlds: the tradition of folk poetry, sermons, religious and drinking songs, modified or "empiric" verses by different authors. The *metaphysics of Slovenianism* and its language are called into question, parodied, and kept at a distance by Taufer's language exercises, which, however, are still determined by the object of their "criticism". Therefore, the *exercises* become *assignments* as well: the assignments through which the destruction, the disintegration of the false totality and its language iconography help to achieve a "purification and rejuvenation" of the traditional world and its language. Assignments as tasks whose aim is not simply to do away with tradition in an avant-garde Utopian way, but to reactivate tradition poetically, to "liberate" its words from ossified meanings.

Some poems (particularly *Voyage from to*, which foreshadows visual and concrete poetry) already announce a transition to ultramodernism, which flourished in Slovenia in the second half of the sixties. The terms referring to the movement, invented by the then modernist literary criticism ("reism", "ludism", "linguism"), are almost fully covered by the poetics of *Exercises and Assignments*.

Data (1972), Taufer's next original collection, is a thorough farewell to "thematic orientation"; it wants to produce new – syntactic as well as semantic – language forms, and thus to break "within the text" the fixed ideas about the limits and possibilities of poetic language. The title itself – *Data* – gives the impression of something "objective", impersonal, real, far away from any subjectivism, "psychologizing" etc. It is about cataloguing the world, which is a world of facts. Poetry is thus turned into an autonomous, "auto-referential" play of language, into a production of aesthetic pieces of "information", which are in the first part of the book enclosed in the sonnet form, and in the second part in poems consisting of three four-line stanzas, with nouns denoting a real thing, a phenomenon, or a living being as titles. The body of these poems triggers a train of associations which puts the word in the title into different combinations, broadens and, above all, forms its semantic field anew. Thus the linguistic conventions, phraseologems, pieces of folk wisdom are de-constructed, which results, among other things, in new sound,

syntactic, lexical, rhythmical, and aesthetic qualities. Poetic freedom develops into the adventure of language, into detecting the cracks in the established linguistic practice. Freedom is the freedom within language.

The freedom within language is the freedom of playing with language, liberated from "ideological models" and from the traditional "tabulation" of poems, from "representativeness" etc. The further, "post-Taufer" destiny of modernism and ultramodernism testifies that the awareness of the "anguish of language" may eventually turn into the language of anguish alone, and linguism into convention, or even ideology, which is, all in all, the fate of any avant-garde. This development is reflected in Taufer's next step – from *Data* to another collection with an elucidative title, *A Song-book of Used Words* (1975). Yet he himself cannot evade a basic paradox: to break through "linguism", the modernist "method" still prevails, whereas its "aim" – to break through the language "auto-referentialism" – is already surpassed. However, "staying at the halfway point" is not a "deficiency" of Taufer's poetics. On the contrary, it testifies to an uncompromising attitude, to "self-criticism", to a reflection on his own endeavours and poetological dilemmas, which have been the destiny of poetic modernism ever since Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé.

The poetics of "the song-book of used words" is based on the recognition of the im-possibility of total innovation. Accepting that the words have already been used before results in a farewell to the teleological, avant-garde illusion about progress into infinity, which sooner or later turns out to be a "bad infinity". *A Song-book of Used Words* dismisses the radicalism of *Data*. It aspires to step out of the world, which is merely the *world of language*, and to return to the existential, universally human problems. With regard to the journey made, to the experience of desubjectivism, of "dehumanization", of semantic ambivalence, of the "alchemy of language" etc., this step cannot be taken by simply returning to the pre-modernist "poetry of experience" with its "lyrical" voice. Within the horizon of modernism (which cannot be ignored: its burden has to be borne and the consequences accepted) and its language adventurism – the development into the anguish of language –, the step can only be taken by carefully approaching the mythical, "pre-logical" perception of the world, when there was no difference between the world of words and the world of things. Moreover: *In the beginning there was the word.*

Taufer tries to express poetically the mythical-archetypal by resorting to the tradition of (Slovenian) folk poetry, but in his own specific way: while a theme in folk poems ordinarily varies, Taufer dissects it; in terms of the content, form, and melody, it is no longer a rounded-off unity, which was one of the basic features of folk poetry with its universal, popular "intelligibility". In *A Song-book of Used Words* the deconstructive method is used, which is generally a characteristic poetic "method" with Taufer. He circles around separate bits of motifs, at the same time approaching and distancing himself from them, he uses and plays with different perspectives, positions, and angles. Words are torn out of their manipulatively conventional, traditionally common usage; they start to live a new life and vibrate on ever different frequencies. At the same time, due to their own "participation" in the initiatory linguistic act, they preserve the seal of the archetypal and of world-formation, of the creator's unique gesture in denominating the world and its phenomena.

Taufer's poetic method that has prevailed ever since his first collections is precisely defined by his own statement that writing poems is "one hard struggle with language" – found in the extensive text *On the Usage of Used Words*, which accompanied *A Song-book of Used Words*. A hard struggle with language means resisting the seductive temptation to let the poems "close up", have one meaning only, to let them put the world in order, and to let them organize it into a controllable whole. On the contrary, the poems participate in the journey bound for the unknown: the poem itself should be aware of its openness, of its unclarity, ambiguity, multifacetedness, and polysemy.

And being world-formational, the language is, paradoxically, nearest to death. *A Song-book of Used Words* on the phenomenon of death. "Death, darkness, nothingness, god, remain the reality of poems," says Taufer in the accompanying text. The diversity and the simultaneous identicalness of these definitions above all suggest that poetry is not and cannot be the medium of a "positive", logically-discursive definition of "truth", of "truthfulness". Both are always evasive due to the lack of a neutral perspective, of a meta-linguistic, meta-physical authority which could enable such a definition. Taufer's "answer" is in a way logical: the truth is multifaceted, evasive, and much better expressed by the plural form. Poetry is a sensually illustrative "staging" of the truth and "truths" respectively. Death, darkness, nothingness, god cannot be "articulated", and their (poetic) concept cannot be developed,

still less defined in a predicative way. Death, as well as darkness, nothingness, and god, simply *exists*.

As stated above, Taufer's basic effort is to break through to the mythical-archetypal cores preserved in the tradition of folk poetry, through which he tries to make contact with the universal experience. This experience has been verbalized in the originative, not yet inflated language. A bulk of linguistic material has to be broken and dug through: but it is still the voice of modernism that forms, moulds, organizes, and "sends on" this material. *A Song-book of Used Words* recovers from the anguish of language and the pain of muteness by varying old texts, the origins of which lead into the ancient pre-logical world, into the world of absolute reality, where words did not yet have a life of their own, and therefore could not know the destiny of a modern poet – a present-day Orpheus –, "banished into these mute wounds" (*Lord Barodda*).

One of the guiding principles of Taufer's poetry, which he himself points out in his discursive texts as well, is the experience of the non-totality, of the fragmentariness, of the relativity of the world. He makes an effort to articulate it as plastically as possible; Taufer's poetics is the poetics of a fragment. Fragmentation of the world and language is inherited from the paradigmatic gesture of modernism: recognition of any ("traditional", "metaphysical", "classical") *totality* is deceptive. The famous sentence by Adorno "The unreal is a totality", which is a "negative" paraphrase of the even more famous sentence by Hegel, "The real is a totality", expresses all the subversiveness of modernism (the fragmentariness and dispersity attested by works of modernism results in fragmenting their own reading and interpretation). The classical rounding-off, "the organic quality" of the artistic works is preserved at the formal level alone. For instance: the poetic form of a sonnet is with Taufer really only a "form". At the same time his sonnets destroy the rigid architectonics of the sonnet form prescribed by the rules of versification, thus re-establishing the distance from tradition. The sonnet form, although provisional, is a technopoetic must, but at the same time it is "ironic" as well because it obviously breaks the rules. The form is a necessary arranging principle, a precondition, for a poem which has abandoned the classical "narration", the "theme", the "idea", which have guaranteed its entirety. By means of the form a poem preserves its skeleton, without which it could not be distinguished as such, and without which it would be dissolved into an inarticulated

linguistic flow. The limit of the form – inasmuch as it is “modernized” and thus modified – is the limit of the (modernist) world as well.

Taufer’s collection *Straightening Nails and Other Poems* (1979) continues to fragment the world. And to repeat: a fragment belies *a totality*. A totality is – from the modernist perspective – “ideological”. The poetic quality of language is incompatible with any ideology, with poeticizing *a totality*. Instead there are pieces, independent remains of the formerly whole world, which are beyond manipulation, beyond the set usage and beyond availability. However, the play of language is not only something playful. As in *A Song-book of Used Words*, the “aim” of Taufer’s poetry in *Straightening Nails* is to reconstruct the mythical awareness. The “method” is distinctly minimalistic; the central cycle, the title-cycle, is based on “second-class” words: adjectives, past participles, conjunctions, attributes. By using such, according to Taufer, “waste material”, he tries to restore the power of the primal experience, of linguistic articulation not yet subjected to cliché, to the words “less appropriate” for poetry at first sight (on account of which they have remained “unused” in the poetic tradition). Such a rotation, the spiral circling of words with their inversions, contributes to re-semanticization; despite its utterly reduced and ascetic vocabulary it enables an enlargement of the poetic field.

Taufer’s linguistic asceticism is simultaneously a linguistic magic; with his double-levelled metaphor, lexical dissonance, “atonic” and oxymoronic rhetorical strategy, he breaks through the temporal-locational continuum and the common perceptive logic, enters what evades the collective and individual awareness, awakens the half-lost national, culturally-civilizational, personal memory: “a word turns over / falling on the teeth the tongue / turns over the path remains” (*Mute among the Trees*).

The cycle *Little Merry Fugues on Death* stands at the end of *Straightening Nails and Other Poems*, and at the beginning of Taufer’s seventh original collection (three selections of his poems were published in between), *Terze-Rime for a Dented Trumpet* (1985). Taufer frequently includes his older poems in his new collections, transferring them, “correcting” them etc., which all testifies to the inter-relatedness and continuity of his oeuvre.

One of the *Little Merry Fugues on Death* introducing *Terze-Rime* ends with the stanza: “death plays / with me / as with a child”. The mingling of serious and humorous diction is characteristic of this poem as well as of the major part of the collection. By means of humour, the

title itself being humorous, Taufer succeeds in avoiding pathos. But the humour is bitter. *Terze-rime* thematically focuses on two “phenomena”, closely interwoven and vital to Taufer’s poetics: death and muteness. The words *death* and *muteness/silence* appear in different forms and collocations in almost each poem: “silence sinks into twilight”, “death’s keeping silent”, “playing to a silence bar”, “the silent prophet”, “mute / immensely”, “death // for every man”, “death / with a poem of a deep wound”. In Taufer’s poetics, the way is not open yet for direct, transparent expressions of sadness and pain, the poems of “deep wounds” are still structured in the way of palimpsests: the cry of horror is filtered through his associations with the distant echoes of the poetic worlds of such Slovenian poets as Prešeren, Murn, Vodušek, Kosovel, Kocbek, Cankar, Jenko. And at the same time it is encoded by means of Taufer’s characteristic semantic ambivalence, syntactic combinations, minimalism, and the deconstructive “method”.

Terze-Rime for a Dented Trumpet testifies to the helplessness of a totalizing poetic enterprise, and sets off into “the parchment night”. The poems speak about being condemned to solitude, and their voyage co-ordinates are circularly-spiral: “and solitary forward backward / wandering to an fro” (*Wandering To and Fro*): until the poem, by means of self-abolishment, is condensed into a cry, which announces – in the final stanzas of the poem *You Are Only* – dissolution into silence:

the circle
of lines
o

dusty
oh dreadful
o

O is not only a graphic representation of a circle and Taufer’s “prophecy of the circle”. *O* is the voice/the letter of marvelling that the world *is*, and at once the voice/the letter of primal horror. The “dualism” is in a way confirmed by the double nature of poetic texts: with Taufer, each poem is at once a festival of birth and death. A festival of birth because it recapitulates the creative act of denominating the world, which has the meaning of domestication, of “humanization”. A festival of death because the words of the poet are at the same time the words of man’s “self-awareness”: they express the truth of their own mortality.

Shards of Poems (1989), one of Taufer's later poetry collections, retains the "structural" dualism. Individual titles can be understood as a unique recapitulation of Taufer's work up to this collection: *Tearing Up, Fragments out of the Pannonian Sea, Poems from the Play* (from Taufer's play *Odysseus & Son or The World and Home*, 1990), *Myths, Fragments Yet Picked Up, Genesis*. Characteristic of the whole collection is the loosening of semantic extremities, which enables emotional outbursts, and thus a more distinct articulation of the primary existentialities, of the experience of horror and disintegration brought about by "the age of ice". The thematic core of Taufer's poetry is still the destiny of man as a *mortal* being, and increasingly as a being of *death* as well. The writing itself turns into an act of suffering and pain: "in the bare cuirasses of scales / move the spawn of words / through the cave of the poet's mouth / of open wounds into the sunken world" (*Atlantis*).

In *Shards of Poems*, as well as in his subsequent collections *Ever Odes* (1996), *Flakes* (2000), and *Letter in a Bottle* (2006), Taufer indirectly returns to the topography of the world which featured in his early poems. After a long poetic voyage, the only remains of a poem are its pieces, painfully torn out of "open wounds", out of the "poet's mouth". The truth of a poem is its shards. A poem can exist as a poem in the cracks alone, and its words are *cracked words*. They announce the entrance of poetry into the world of sounds and voices, where letters themselves "weave silence" (*Miserable Is Who Remains Death*).

In Taufer's poetry, the Orpheus myth thus meets a peculiar fate. Does this mean that the voice of a modern Orpheus can only be the voice of a *mute Orpheus*?

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About the Ecumenical Structure of Estonian (Literary) Culture: the Case of *Kevade* (‘Spring’) by Oskar Luts

REIN VEIDEMANN

I would like to start this article by sharing a personal experience. Every summer our family travels to the settlement of Palamuse, which is situated 40 km northeast of the second biggest town in Estonia – Tartu. We visit the church dedicated to St Bartholomew, first mentioned in 1234. By the way, the church is the only church in Estonia built below the sea level. The name of Bartholomew evidently gave rise to the toponym Palamuse. We walk in the old church park, visit the old parish school (built in 1873) and now functioning as a museum, we stop on the milldam, buy the special medicine – “punsli õli” in the local pharmacy and have lunch in a bar opposite the pastorate. Our visit is a kind of ritual. Palamuse is the Mecca for our family. It is a well-known fact that Palamuse conveys a very special meaning for many Estonians. Palamuse has always been the destination of most annual excursions organised by Estonian schools. Palamuse is on the list of tourist routes taking visitors to Tartu and South-Estonia. So Palamuse may be regarded as one of Estonia’s business cards.

There can be found tens of such small and cute settlements in Estonia. But Palamuse is special due to one literary occurrence, which took place in 1912–1913. During these years Oskar Luts (1887 – 1953), who came from the same parish, the future People’s Writer (such an official title – The People’s Writer of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic was awarded to him on July 20, 1945)¹ published his novel /

¹ Oskar Luts was the very first Estonian writer, who was awarded the title. During the Soviet occupation (1940 – 1991) 14 writers received the title of the

long story *Kevade* ('Spring', Part I – 1912, part II – 1913), comprising snapshots from one school year at the end of the 19th century.

Luts was 26 years old when the book was published and it was his début in the field of prose. His début did not determine only the status of Luts as a writer but also had an enormous impact on the Estonian literature of the 20th century and on the culture in general. Luts wrote a sequel to *Kevade*, portraying the life of his characters in several subsequent novels (*Suvi*, 'Summer', part I 1918, part II 1919; *Tootsi pulm* 'Toots's wedding', 1921; *Äripäev*, 'Business day', 1924; *Sügis*, 'Autumn', part I, the complete works 1988), creating a peculiar microcosm, reflecting the variety and ever-changing Estonian village community in all its diversity.

Luts presented characters conveying the features of certain archetypes, due to which they easily obtained the status of the common Estonian language metaphors and idioms (like the above-mentioned special medicine - "punsli õli"). It is easy for the Estonian readers to identify themselves with the characters or compare their fate to that of their own. Luts tells his story in a popular manner, tinted with subtle humour, melancholy and existential meditations. His narrative aims to be "most communicative", reaching out for the "other" (i.e. the reader). "More than any other Estonian writer did Luts try to overcome "the grate of being different", which actually seems to be the secret of the everlasting impact of his creative work," stated Aivar Kull, who wrote a monograph about Luts (Kull 2007: 265). In the 20th century *Kevade* was published in 16 editions, in the 1920s it became a compulsory book in schools. When Oskar Luts became 50 years old, his jubilee was celebrated nation-wide in 1937. The questionnaire, carried out during 1998 – 2000 to establish most outstanding national figures, ranked Oskar Luts among the 25 most popular people of the century. People chose him the third most popular Estonian writer of the 20th century after Anton Tammsaare and Jaan Kross.

Estonian literary scholars have unanimously agreed that the text of *Spring* by Oskar Luts possesses myth-creating ability. What kind of myth are we talking about and how does it function, i.e. (or in other words) why has Palamuse become Mecca for several generation of

People's Writer, but Aivar Kull regards Oskar Luts as the "only genuine people's writer", because the majority of the People's Writers were artificially elevated members of the nomenclature." (Kull 2007: 332)

Estonians since the middle of the 20th century until the present day, also interests me.

Here we can see how a piece of semiosis of literature structured from verbal language as the secondary code system – appears in the function of the regulator of physical/real space. In *Kevade* the action takes place in the settlement called Paunvere, which is the literary image of Palamuse, and thanks to the genius of the writer, it becomes the model of the Estonian village community, charging symbolically the physical landmarks of Palamuse. Palamuse Church is not only the church dedicated to St. Bartholomew. It is the church, which bell-ringer is a certain character from *Kevade* called Libbe, and in which bell-tower one of the main characters Arno Tali likes to meditate about eternity. The parish school is not any parish school among hundreds of parish schools in Estonia, but the symbol of childhood of the whole (Estonian) nation, like the child-characters Teele, Toots, Kiir, Tõnisson, Lesta, Imelik, Arno and many others. It comprised both – cruel parish clerks and kind teachers. All characters created by Oskar Luts somehow embody certain characteristic features: Teele – a girl with high self-esteem, capricious, presumptuous; Toots – a restless dodger, but courageous and venturesome; Kiir – shy, naïve, but obedient, faithful and ambitious; Arno – an introvert and melancholic “philosopher” (also considered to be the author’s *alter ego*); Tõnisson – introvert, phlegmatic, the conception of the “insensitive” embodiment of a typical Estonian peasant; Imelik – a bohemian rogue (already his name Imelik indicates characteristic features that are weird).

The high level of generalisation has transformed the names into metaphors in the general language. For example, the nickname of the parish clerk was Julk-Jüri, which has become a synonym of a punitive and shouting teacher; on the other hand teacher Laur (a teacher in *Kevade* who understands children and treats them equally with adults) symbolises goodness. By the way, the biggest Estonian weekly *Maaleht* has founded a non-profit organisation Arno Tali Foundation, which awards the best teacher in Estonian the Prize of Teacher Laur. The mentioned foundation also awards scholarships to successful pupils called Arno and Teele Scholarships. The given examples confirm that a piece of literature does not only function in culture as text or metatext, but as an institution, arranging and influencing the society.

The domination of the symbolic space (Paunvere) of *Kevade* over the real physical space (Palamuse) is also revealed in the fact that the

traditional autumn fair at Palamuse at every third weekend of September is advertised as Paunvere fair. Once in a while people really think that Paunvere, like Palamuse, is a real place in Estonia.

The activating impact of *Kevade*, like of many other literary works with literary microcosm, can be predicted. Cultural semiotics handle the space as “dimension which practically unites all human semiotic systems: space is both the context of all primary, secondary modelling systems, and also the substrate for them” (Randviir 2002: 143). Therefore, the relationship of space of the observed Paunvere and Palamuse may be observed as inter-textual or inter-semiotic (between different semiosises) dialogue, which forms the basis for the emergence of a new structure, which I would call ecumenical structure.

Ecumenical structure is a new unity, created at the meeting of different semiosises, entwining and reciprocally intensifying, establishing the foundation for individual and collective identities, representing the whole culture as text (Lotman 1990: 303), being one of its “proper names” (taking *Kevade* as an example: Palamuse > Paunvere > Eesti/Estonia). The ecumenical structure of culture becomes visible in certain realistic and mental places, in repeated cultural events (in ritual procedures, customs, traditions).

One of the most typical generation mechanisms of ecumenical structure works as follows: a writer writes a text (short story, novel, poem) about his place of living and/or based on his memories), which is amplified due to ideological, ethical or aesthetical reasons via a dramatisation, a film, a TV play or music. Within this amplification a new structural unity – cultural dominant – is generated, “which further on has a decisive role in the social, cultural, cosmogonic and ethic structuring.” (Lotman 2001: 45).

The possibility and the formation mechanism of ecumenical structure – actually not using the same term – was studied by Juri Lotman, for whom culture actually meant structure, in which the dialogue between the world of common names and proper names occurs, a constant exchange of locations of exterior and interior processes (ib. 153–156). For example, in the article “Culture as subject” he deals with structures creating meaning like peculiar semiotic monads, entering into convergence relationships with other monads, creating higher structural associations (Lotman 1999: 42–43). In his article “Dynamics of Culture” Lotman opens the essence of the transition process: “an activity” on one level, having a meaning is

substituted by a meaning on another level, expressed by activity" (ib. 162). Or in other words, e.g. an episode from a piece of literature acquires a meaning (dialogue between characters, description of an event or a character) obtains a meaning on another cultural level (dramatisation, film), dictating/modelling the activity. In the article "Symbol in Culture" Juri Lotman declares that "every culture needs text stratification, fulfilling the function of *archaika*" (ib. 222). The ecumenical structure of culture serves this *archaika*. The ecumenical structure of culture has many similar features with the universal constants of culture, upon which Juri Lotmani focussed his cultural-theoretical research, let it be the code text, cultural model, cultural syntagma or communicative algorithm.²

From the point of view of the ecumenical structure of culture is relevant the theory of symbolic interactionism by the American social scientist Herbert Blumer (1900 – 1987). Blumer's central theses states that the society as a symbol of order is a cultural construction (Blumer 1988: 87–88). Methodological support for giving theoretical meaning to the relationship between culture and the society can be found in the work of Pirkkoliisa Aphonon (Aphonon 2001).

In addition to the two above-mentioned, there are two more theoretical-philosophical sources, which have inspired me to deal with the ecumenical structure of culture. Philosopher of hermeneutic Hans-Georg Gadamer has defined the text via interpretation: a text performs itself only in the relationship of interpretation (Gadamer 2002: 254); text is an intermediate product in creating reciprocal understanding, also comprising certain abstraction as such (ib.). Pursuant to this statement the ecumenical structure of culture may comprise also the so-called abstract text, from which – as stated above – ideology, forming identity is derived. Namely, the latter may be connected to the statement made by Jüri Talvet in his essay *Sümbiootiline kultuur* ('Symbiotic culture') about the inherent ideology of literature and art. The fact that "in literature there is no word or image that does not convey ideological judgement", that "any literary expression *volens nolens* conveys ideological accents, reflecting a kind of world view" (Talvet 2005: 51), makes the ecumenical structure possible.

² Peet Lepik has thoroughly dealt with Juri Lotman's cultural universals in his monography "About Universals in Juri Lotman's semiotic context" (Lepik 2007).

Figuratively speaking, any semiosis emits specific means of expression by using certain idea clusters, which are amplified into one integral unity in a dialogue. Any ecumenical (associating differences) structure of culture at the same time also carries cultural symbiosis.

The reminiscent-nostalgic structure of the text activates the notion of Palamuse as a real place, but also as the space of paradise lost. The association is probably triggered by the very first sentence of the story, which is evidently the most popular initial sentence in Estonian literature: "When Arno and his father arrived at school the lessons had already begun". Or interpreting it: the best times were already over. Estonian literary researcher Jaan Undusk has studied the sacral structure of *Kevade* more thoroughly and has come to the conclusion that the first sentence comprises two powerful paradigms generating melancholy: the 19th century *fin de siècle* and the existentialist philosophy in the 20th century (Undusk 1988: 30). At this point I want to emphasise that although the text of *Kevade* is considered to be myth-creating, the text itself obtains energy from mythological semiosis.

I have already pointed out above that *Kevade* by Oskar Luts was included in compulsory literature not long after publishing. In the survey of school literature published by Mihkel Kampmaa in 1923, Luts acquires the reputation of the author of juvenile literature. Proceeding from that fact one might observe one of the components of educational canon of the 20th century literary culture in *Kevade*.

Kevade as one of the initiators of the ecumenical structure in Estonian culture, gained additional meaning from the dramatization and long stage life of the play *Kevade*, produced by Andres Särev. Professional theatres in Estonia have staged plays by Luts 140 times, which gives every reason to regard Oskar Luts as one of the cornerstones of the original theatre productions in Estonia. *Kevade* has been staged by many other producers beside Särev. One of the most influential dramatizations and performances, having a noticeable impact on the Estonian theatre, was definitely the production of *Kevade* by Voldemar Panso in 1969.

However, the new turning point in mythologization of "Spring" arrived together with the film *Kevade*, produced by Arvo Kruusement in the 1970s (script by Kaljo Kiisk and Voldemar Panso), followed by *Suvi* (1976) (script by Paul-Eerik Rummo) and *Sügis* (1991) (script by Mats Traat). All films strengthen the archetypes of the events and characters in "Spring", and influenced the further acceptance of *Kevade*

as a literary text. *Kevade* has not only been staged but has also appeared in the form of a ballet (Ülo Vinter, Mai Murdmaa) (1967) and musical (Ülo Vinter, Sulev Nõmmik) (1991).

Kevade and Luts have been surrounded by numerous legends and anecdotes, which illustrate the phenomenon of a text becoming folklore. *Kevade* somehow started to represent the whole national culture. In his monography Aivar Kull vividly describes how *Kevade* is used in paraphrase. Namely, in 1994 President Lennart Meri compared the newly independent Republic of Estonia with the main character Arno Tali, suffering from pneumonia in the novel. As Arno recovered from his illness, so will Estonia regain its health, said Meri in conclusion (Kull 2007: 65–66).

I have described the transformation of one text in Estonian culture. But every text comprises a specific independent unity of semiotic structure. Observing from the Estonian reader's point of view every independent semiosis transfers a part of its structural energy to the generation of a new unity. It does not have to be connected only with national identity. It may be an emotional-mental unity, created thus on the basis of it.

Figuratively speaking, the new structure, called ecumenical resembles the pillar of the world in Estonian folklore - the Big Oak Tree as the mythological image of the time-space unity.

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Golding's Use of Myths in *Lord of the Flies*

MOHIT K. RAY

Andrew Sanders writes in *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*: "Golding emerged as a major successor to an established line of modernist mythopoeists. Unlike Yeats, Eliot, Joyce, Jones, however, he was not content with a reanimation of ancient myth; he was intent on overturning and superseding a variety of modern rationalist formulations and on replacing them with charged, unorthodox moral shapes" (595). In his *Lord of the Flies* (1954), a landmark postwar novel in English, William Golding introduces several motifs which invite us to recall ancient myths. In this story of a bunch of boys, who – on being suddenly cut off from adult civilization and thrown into extreme isolation – quickly slide back to atavism, primitivism, and homicide, Golding subtly evokes the Biblical myths of the Fall – sibling rivalry – hell as well as the Greek myth of the two gods – Apollo and Dionysus – representing the rational and irrational life-principles respectively. Golding weaves various mythical strands into the texture of his novel to substantiate his vision. Some of these are: the evocation of the cult of beast-god, the performance of the act of hunting as a magic ritual, the beheading and dismemberment of the victim (first of a pig, eventually of the boy Piggy) the elaborate Biblical and Hellenic resonances etc. Then there are myths which Golding brings under critical scrutiny mainly to demolish. The imperial myth that a group of public school British boys, like the boys of *The Coral Island*, were capable of creating a civilized world in any situation, and the romantic myth that children were incarnations of innocence, are the two major myths that Golding systematically explodes. As a result we have a very intricate mythic pattern where the mythic collides with the

present and makes the tale not only preternatural and archetypal, but also timeless and universal.

The paper proposes to trace the mythical overtones to show how these add special dimensions of meanings to the novel and how Golding's use of the mythopoetic here reflects his response to the impasse posed by the trauma and challenge of the post-war years, while helping him to dislodge some of the cultural 'grand narratives' of his times.

In this grim tale of "a pack of British boys" in a deserted island – spatially situated in an anonymous "coral island" in the South Pacific, and chronologically placed in some indefinite future – Golding uses different motifs which hark back to ancient myths, both pagan and Christian, and invite us to recall them in order to grasp the full philosophical and aesthetic implications of his work. It is also interesting to see how these two sets of myths are telescoped to produce a rich pattern of mythical interstices.

Isabel MacCaffrey, while discussing myth in *Paradise Lost as 'Myth'*, argues that a myth is "a narrative resurrection of a primitive reality, told in satisfaction of deep religious wants" (MacCaffrey 1967: 23). In the light of this definition *Lord of the Flies* can be seen as a modern myth on the ancient theme of the conflict between the good and the evil, in which evil always triumphs in the beginning. The children in the novel can be neatly divided into two categories: the good and the bad. If Ralph, Piggy and Simon belong to the category of the good, Jack, Roger and Maurice belong to the category of the bad or evil. If Ralph stands for democracy and discipline, Jack stands for autocracy and despotism. When hounded by Jack and his company Ralph cries for mercy, the story at once assumes Christian significations. The murder of Simon elevates him to the status of a Christ figure. S. J. Boyd has rightly remarked that Simon's death is "re-enacting the crucifixion of Jesus Christ" and his life is "an imitation of Christ" (Boyd 1988: 17). In regard to the question whether Simon can be looked upon as a Christ figure Golding himself categorically stated "Simon was originally in my version a much more overtly sanctified victim, a Christ figure" (*The Sunday Statesman*). He admits that he made some changes in the final version but insists: "I don't think there is any explanation whether Simon is a Christ figure or not – the reader must make up his own mind. I made him a Christ figure" (ib.). Ralph's weeping at the end of the innocence also foregrounds the theme of sin and expiation. It is

possible to identify many other Biblical echoes. The island itself reminds one of the Garden of Eden, Simon's meeting the "Lord of the Flies" distantly reenacts Christ's meeting with the devil in the desert as Ralph-Jack relationship reminds one of the Biblical story of Cain and Abel of the Book of Genesis of *The Bible*. The Swedish Academy, in fact, called attention to this aspect of the novel when Professor Lars Gyllensten of the Swedish Academy elaborated in his "Presentation Speech" [for the Nobel Prize in Literature 1983] about "the pattern of myth" in Golding's writing:

Golding inveighs against those who think that it is the political or other systems that create evil. Evil springs from the depths of man himself-- it is the wickedness in human beings that creates the evil systems or that changes what from the beginning is, or could be, good into something iniquitous and destructive. There is a mighty religious dimension in William Golding's conception of the world, though hardly Christian in the ordinary sense. He seems to believe in a kind of Fall. Perhaps rather one should say that he works with the myth of a Fall.

(www.Nobel.se/literature/1983/presentation-speech.html
[Official website of the Nobel Foundation; Copyright© Nobel Foundation] 17.6.03.).

The most important myth that Golding brings under sharp focus and systematically explodes is the romantic myth of the child as an innocent creature — a myth that developed with the Romantic movement particularly in the writings of Rousseau and Wordsworth to whom a child represented a pre-Industrial Revolution innocence, and had an unlimited capacity for wonder and fancy. Reacting against the romantic notion that man is basically noble and the essential goodness of man emerges only when he is free from the fetters of the society, and that the child is innocence incarnate, Golding insists that evil is inherent in man. In order to drive home his thesis Golding takes the boys away from the civilized world and shows what happens when the social controls are removed. Our social behaviors are controlled behaviors. In the society we behave the way we are expected to behave and not the way we would like to, had we had the choice. A man comes to his real self only when the trappings of the society are removed and there is no external control and Golding's thesis is that in that situation the evil in

man comes out and takes possession of him. This is exactly what happens in *Lord of the Flies*. The novel opens with the description of Ralph and incidentally it ends also with Ralph, because it is the experience of Ralph that constitutes the burden of the novel. In other words, it is through the experience of Ralph that the thesis is communicated. Next to Ralph comes Piggy whose thick spectacles conventionally suggest that he is to be taken as an intellectual or a superior intellect. But in the course of the novel Piggy dies an animal death and his death symbolizes the death of reason when evil takes charge of the situation. In the beginning of the novel we see the boys extremely happy about the fact that there is no elderly person to control them, and they have the "delight of realized ambition" (12). They think that they can build up a civilized world. In fact, with the help of a conch shell using it as an instrument of discipline and symbol of civilization they seriously try to build up a miniature civilization. There are meetings, specific duties and seriousness of purpose. But even at this stage there is foreshadowing of evil in the deteriorating relation between Ralph and Jack. However, the huts are built and it shows man's capacity to harness nature. But in the course of the novel the huts are in shambles in Chapter X when Jack and his party ransack the huts to take away the glasses of Piggy.

Civilization begins to collapse as we see that the fire has gone out. The hunt and the ritual chant coincide with the breaking of rules. And the chant that we hear in Chapter V grows louder and louder in the novel so as to drown the voice of civilization at last. At this stage the beast is seen as something external. Even in the next chapter the dead airman is seen as the beast - a beast from a dying world. But gradually the beast is internalized. It takes quite some time to realize that the beast lies within us. Simon is the first person to realize this. Quite early on, in Chapter V, in fact, Simon has his intuitive flash: "maybe there is a beast" (110), "maybe it's only us" (111). Simon's hallucination is an attempt to communicate the incommunicable. In Chapter VIII Simon draws a hallucinatory monologue from the pig's head. The "[pig's] head on a stick" (177) becomes the central symbol of the novel. It is the head of a beast; an offering to the beast left by the boys whose bestiality is marked by the head of pig on a stick. It may be noted here in this connection that though Beelzebub - the "lord of the flies" is a "beast"; he remains impalpable, cannot be caught or hunted, or killed. An illusory figure, he sits on an illusory throne of sorts just behind the peak

of the mountain and remains a threat, which is again a pathetic illusion. But though illusion it helps Jack to gain ground for his demonic rituals of a dark religion, and prompt the boys to slide with him downwards, metaphorically speaking. Thus through the icon of the dead airman Beelzebub stages his entry into the island, into the hearts of the boys. The boys make ritualistic offerings to the beast – portions of their hunt.

By the time we reach the last chapter “The Cry of the Hunters” we are left in no doubt about the great and terrible truth that man is basically evil. Deep down he is a beast.

It may be worth recalling in this connection that the idea of the basic bestiality of man has always captured the attention of the great thinkers. Nietzsche divided the Greek genius into the Dionysian and the Apollonian elements, ecstatic excitement and luminous order respectively

Euripides’s *Bacchae* tells us that when Dionysus, son of Zeus through Semele, grew up he became the god of revelry and vine and men established the cult for his worship. The cult hinged largely on orgiastic rites. The Dionysiac rites, we are told, were partly a dignified and beautiful Nature-worship and partly the cruel slaughter of cattle. In course of the play Euripides describes how Agave, the mother of Pentheus, in her Bacchic trance imagined him to be lion and with inhuman strength tore off his arm at the shoulder. Incidentally, in *Lord of the Flies* Simon is imagined as a pig, and is brutally killed.

In Book I of *Endymion* Keats gives an elaborate account of a rustic sacrifice by a revered priest and attended by shepherds and country maidens. In Book IV of *Endymion* we have a powerful description of the frenzied activity and Dionysian revel, where the Indian Maid sings of the coming of Bacchus and tells of music and dancing and revelry.

The earnest trumpet spake, and silver thrills /From
kissing cymbals made a merry din- /’T was Bacchus and
his kin! /Like to a moving vintage down they came,
/Crown’d with green leaves, and faces all on flame;/All
madly dancing through the pleasant valley...”

The hunting of the sow in Chapter VIII when the boys become “wedded to her in lust” (167) and the sow “collapsed under them, and they were heavy and fulfilled upon her” (168) has the overtones of the sex act reinforced in the orgy of the dancing of the “hunters” in the hunting

scene ("Kill the pig. Cut his throat. Spill his blood" (187,188)) in the Chapter IX, "A View to a Death". It may be noted that there is no female on the island except the pigs. Closely related to hunting is the wearing of masks as part of the ritual; so is the chant and dance during and after hunting. A mask simultaneously hides and reveals. It hides the public face but reveals the real man. In other words, the real man comes out under the protection of the mask. Mask is a device of deception. Jack's and his company's gradual moral degeneration into beasts is registered in their gradual dependence on the mask. In Chapter Five when "Jack stood there streaked with brown earth..." (63), the process of deception has just set in. But gradually they realized that "the mask was a thing of its own, behind which Jack hid, liberated from shame and self-consciousness." (80). As they degenerated into "[d]emoniac figures with faces of white and red and green rushed out howling" (173) because they "understood only too well the liberation into savagery that the concealing paint brought" (212).

We have already referred to the Bacchic orgy. The murder of Simon mistaken for a beast distantly echoes and illustrates the Bacchic orgy. Again, Piggy's fall and death in the course of the scuffle over the conch reminds one of the humiliation of Christ: "They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff" (*Holy Bible*, Luke 4: 29).

The point is that man has an innate propensity to violence and cruelty.

Theodore Ripp points out that according to Thucydides "war began with plunder. Both Hellenes and Barbarians ... were commanded by powerful chiefs, who took this means of increasing their wealth" (Ripp 501). In Book VI of *Paradise Lost* Raphael describes in detail at Adam's insistence the story of the great war between the good angels and the bad angels. William James felt that "our ancestors have bred pugnacity into our bone and marrow" and that "military instincts and ideals are strong as ever". (Ib. 507)

It may be recalled here that Freud also held in *Civilization and Its Discontents* [1930] that instinct of aggression is innate in man and could lead to the extermination of mankind. In *On Aggression* (New York 1966) Konrad Lorenz also sees aggression as a general instinct. (Ib.)

In brief, the history of human "civilization" (?) gives iron confirmation to the fact that the removal of civilized restraints does not lead to a better society; on the contrary it results in a complete regression to brutality whose seeds are embedded in the "darkness of man's heart".

And what is true about man is also true about the child. What is manifest in man lies in potential in the child.

Golding is reported to have insightfully remarked: "Anybody who knows children knows that they have an enormous capacity for destruction and violence and wickedness. The Christian example of it is given by St. Augustine (he was a twin) and his first memory as a child was pushing his brother away from his mother's breast. That was his indication of no matter how far you go back in man, you find greed at someone else's expense" (*The Sunday Statesman*).

Incidentally, *Lord of the Flies* can also be read as an anagogic myth covering the whole span from creation, fall, receding hope of redemption, appearance-departure-reappearance-death of the Messiah. Thus the novel can be studied in the light of Northrop Frye's spectrum of anagogic myths – from the apocalyptic to the demonic – the beginning and end of man as envisaged in the Biblical myths.

The chronotope of the novel – anonymity of place – a nameless island, indefinite time – a vague future – allows us to fit it into Frye's framework of anagogic myth: "in the narrower ... sense of fictions and themes relating to divine or quasi-divine beings and powers" (Frye 1957: 116). Here the novel seems to connect the two poles of Frye's archetypes: the apocalyptic and the demonic; while Frye perceives the apocalyptic world as a projection of desire, the demonic realm is for him one of nightmare – or heaven and hell. Here eventually it is the hell that takes over. The "Paradise" (green garden) is soon turned into "Hell" (fire, scourge) – apocalyptic giving in to the demonic.

The island represents the paradoxical ambivalence by emblemizing both "Paradise" and "Hell". The ambivalence is apparent from the very start: the island, of idyllic beauty and promise of freedom as it is, is also paradoxically inescapable, and therefore, a prison too.

Again, *Lord of the Flies* conforms nicely to the idea of the myth of descent as suggested by Northrop Frye. In his study of the "Structure of Romance" Frye observed:

From the beginning the poetic imagination has inhabited a middle earth. Above it is the sky with whatever it reveals or conceals: below it is a mysterious place of birth and death from whence animals and plants proceed, and to which they return. There are therefore four primary narrative movements in literature. These are, first, the descent from a higher world; second, the descent to a lower world; third, the ascent from a lower world; and, fourth, the ascent to a higher world. All stories in literature are complications of, or metaphorical derivations from, these four narrative radicals. (Frye 1978: 97)

It is also an autonomous fable, made out of these composite texts. Golding says in "Fable": "...it seems to me that in nineteenth century and early twentieth century society of the West, taboos grew up round the nature of man. He was supposed not to have in him the sad fact of his own cruelty and lust" (McEwan 1983: 161). Golding also clearly shows in this connection his preference for the term "myth" to "fable". "I do feel fable as being an invented thing on the surface whereas myth is something which comes out from the roots of things in the ancient sense of being the key to existence, the whole meaning of life, and experience as a whole" (Kermode 1962: 153). And Frank Kermode, while quoting this, claims that Golding's term "myth" is the "right one";

... out of the single small seed grows this instrument "for controlling... ordering... giving a shape and significance to the immense paradox of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history". These are Mr. Eliot's words on Joyce's myth; but they will serve for Golding. (Ib. 154)

The genesis of Golding's myth is not in the incorruptible child-god or invincible child-hero of earlier ages of British literature. Instead he creates a new universal or "cosmic" myth, to use his own word for it, which is now accepted in common critical parlance.

During the war Golding worked with the Royal Navy, and had seen active duty throughout the period excepting six months. Later he said, "The war produced one notable effect on me. It scared me stiff" (cited by Lass 1966: 355). He commented, "It was the turning point for me. I began to see what people were capable of doing. Where did the Second

World War come from? Was it made by something inhuman and alien – or was it made by chaps with eyes and legs and hearts?” (Ib.) The theme of *Lord of the Flies*, according to Golding, “is an attempt to trace the defects of society back to the defects of human nature. The moral is that the shape of a society must depend on the ethical nature of the individual and not on political system however apparently logical or respectable.” (Ib. 354)

Golding wrote for readers who belong to the post-faith era. But he deliberately distanced himself from his contemporary writers. As Page perceives, Golding was “different from the rest” (Page 1985: 3): “he made it clear ... that he was cutting himself loose from the main tradition of the English novel ... Golding’s tale ... shows an interest in returning to ancient forms of narrative, the fable and the myth ...” (Ib.14)

Indeed, Golding writes with a deep religious sensibility. But he writes in an age when he has to seek for some other language to express his sensibility; hence his adoption of the mythical device. Kermode beautifully sums up the times, i.e. the post-war years in terms of mythical sensibility: “the myth of progress has failed; but the rival myth of necessary evil and universal guilt has come back without bringing God back with it” (Kermode 1985: 50). According to Kermode, who envisioned a return to myth as a “return to Eden” – to innocence and wisdom (ib.), myth “explains the ancient situation to which our anxieties recall us: loss of innocence, the guilt and ignominy of consciousness, the need for pardon.” (Ib. 54)

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The Myth of the Doubles/Twins in the Work of Lojze Kovačič

TOMO VIRK

In 1993, Lojze Kovačič, the most prominent (and recently passed away) Slovene post-war fiction writer (due to his modernist autobiographical novels also called “the Slovene Proust”), wrote a short story, entitled *A Tale of a Two-Headed Son*. It is a story of an impoverished girl Jerica, who has given birth to an illegitimate son, a two-headed child, christened Janez. One of the two heads, sharing the same body, the so-called “right Janez” was good-natured, gentle and pious, while his left counterpart, the “left Janez” grew more and more mean and cruel in character and appearance. This difference became the cause for the twins’ constant disputes early on, and with years grew even more intolerable and painful. While the right Janez prayed, the left one “played with his ding-a-ling”; while the right brother fasted, the left one devoured everything in sight, causing his brother indigestion problems on top of ruining his fasting. One of the worst moments occurred when the left Janez began paying visits to a prostitute, and during one of such visits, no longer being able to fight it, the virtuous right Janez screamed out with pleasure. The story ends with a mutual showdown, the left Janez strangling his brother in a fit of rage and killing himself in the process. The final lines offer a kind of premortal reconciliation between the two brothers.

Kovačič’s short story is, despite of its apparent straightforwardness, very complex and multilayered. First of all, it quite obviously refers to the old myth of the double-faced Janus. But this reference is not as unambiguous as it might seem; to be fully understood, it requires a much more contemporary and culturally specific contextualization. We have to be aware, for example, that the name “Janez” is not only

deliberately reminiscent of “Janus”, but is also a common metonymical denominator for “a Slovene”. Speaking of the two-headed Janez, Kovačič in fact only alludes to the mythical figure, but actually speaks about Slovenes and their recent history. The story of the left and right Janez is namely an allegoric representation of the Slovene political sphere prior to and especially during WWII, when it was divided into the liberal, communist left and the conservative and pre-war clerical right. During the war, both wings also formed their own armed forces, using them in mutual battle, and towards the end of the war the military and political left – exactly as the left Janez in Kovačič’s story – politically as well as physically eliminated the right wing (i. e. the right Janez). In 1993, two years after Slovenia gained independence, the Slovene political sphere, along with its public, after half a century of ideological and political unity, again split into two counterparts, fighting each other for the priority over Slovene independence. While the “left Janez” claimed the 1991 independence, achieved by “the right Janez”, to be the logical consequence of the left-wing national liberation struggle during WWII, “the right Janez” took full credit for the birth of the independent Slovene country.

Kovačič intervened into this debate on nation-building merits very subtly, with a fine sense of irony. Remo Ceserani writes in one of his articles, that “When the political agenda requires a project of nation-building and the construction of identity (for a community, a people, a federation of peoples), the usual move is that of resorting to the literature of the past and asking it to furnish a myth of foundation, a legend or story with which the people can easily identify and find its national character” (Ceserani 2006: 176). Apparently, Kovačič did exactly this. Typologically speaking, his short story is an intertextual reference to the myth of the doubles/twins, which is one of the most widespread and frequent myths in various cultural and religious systems. In most cases (Cain and Abel, Romulus and Remus, Castor and Pollux, but also Apollo and Artemis or Eteokles and Polynices etc.), it plays the foundational role of a culture or civilization and is connected (according to Frazer) to the question of identity. Almost all doubles mentioned above—whether twins or merely siblings—share the element of protagonists’ confrontation (also true of Kovačič’s story),

which mostly ends in death of one of them.¹ At this point, however, Kovačič's story typically creates a new interpretation and re-contextualization of the myth. While fratricide bears an important role in the myth, necessary for the foundation of (national) identity, here, quite on the contrary, fratricide becomes suicide. Therefore, if taking into account the value the left and right Janez occupy in Kovačič's allegoric tale, the author's message, presented within the reinterpretation of the myth, is as follows: the fratricidal nature is auto-destructive for the Slovene nation. From this point of view, Kovačič's short story can also be understood as a powerful political statement in sense of striving for national reconciliation, a statement which presents its idea on the literary rewriting of a well-known myth.

Nevertheless, as already mentioned, Kovačič's short story is far from being one-dimensional, but rather also relates to the doubles myth in other ways, adding to the already fruitful and diverse reception of the myth throughout the European literature and culture. Eliminating one's double in order to ensure one's identity is a characteristic feature not only on the collective, but also on the individual level. Thus, Borges's repeated comments on the hideous and dangerous nature of mirrors on account of their duplicative power² and his frequent treating of concentric dreams, presented as *regressus ad infinitum* or *mise en aby*

¹ Jean Perrot and Clément Rosset comment on this fact, that the seemingly identical mythological twins are actually different (at least) from their birth on. One of them is older, the other younger; one is stronger, the other weaker; in the character of one of them the masculinity prevails, in the other's character the femininity. These differences are, as the cited authors explain, the consequence of the twins struggle against similarity; in this manner they are supposed to avoid the identity confusion, i. e. each of them wants to strengthen his own identity. The ultimate separation from the double/twin is obviously attainable only by his total elimination, with a homicide/fratricide (cf. Troubetzkoy [ed.]) 1995: 8). – If this interpretation holds, than it is quite obvious why the foundation of a certain civilization/culture/nature–the establishment of its identity–is symbolically represented by the doubles/twins archetype with all the implications derived.

² E. g. in *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*: "We discovered (such a discovery is inevitable in the late hours of the night) that mirrors have something monstrous about them. Then Bioy Casares recalled that one of the heresiarchs of Uqbar had declared that mirrors and copulation are abominable, because they increase the number of men" (Borges 1970: 27).

me,³ offer a clear insight into the significant role of duplication in primeval cultures. The latter is thoroughly described in one of the chapters in *The Golden Bough* by J. G. Frazer: dreams, a shadow, an image, reflected in the mirror, a portrait; all represent a death threat. In archaic cultures, the image of a double is therefore understood as a negative omen, threatening an individual's personal identity. In the Christian world it is embodied in the form of a devil, in his *Confessions* St. Augustine (also quoted by Kovačič in his literary works) laments on his psychological fragmentation and speaks with remorse about his two inner wills.

Literary history of the twin/double motif can not neglect plays written by authors such as Plautus (*Menaechmi*; *Amphitruo*), Shakespeare (*Comedy of Errors*), Molière, Kleist and Giraudoux (*Amphitryon*), although the myth has nevertheless found the most prolific literary reception outside the genre of comedy. An important philosophical demarcation line can be seen in Descartes, where a subject can reach self-evidence, the feeling of identity, only through the duplication of the inner-self. The myth is then re-discovered in Romanticism. In 1796, Jean-Paul's novel *Siebenkäs* first introduces the expression "*Doppelgänger*", triggering a flood of representations of the double motif, originally in German Romanticism (Chamisso, Hoffmann, also Goethe), and later elsewhere (Poe: *William Wilson*; Dostoevsky: *The Double*; Maupassant: *The Horla*; Nabokov: *Despair*, etc.). In 1968, the Swiss writer Adolf Muschg publishes a short story entitled *The End of Animal Torture*, a near reflection (or better: anticipation) of Kovačič's story. It describes two Siamese twins with two separate heads, all four limbs and most internal organs, but a shared liver and stomach. As with Kovačič, one of the brothers is even-tempered and the other vivacious; the first one goes to church, the other prefers the cinema. When they reach puberty, the opposites increase; one of the brothers no longer wishes to continue his life and starts dying, which ends fatally for the other one as well.⁴

³ To cite only one example: "You have not awakened to wakefulness, but to a previous dream. This dream is enclosed within another, and so on to infinity, which is the number of grains of sand" (Borges 1970: 206).

⁴ The similarity between Kovačič's story *A Tale of a Two-Headed Son* and Muschg's *The End of Animal Torture* comes as no surprise if we compare some biographical facts of both authors. They were both children of aged parents; they both lost their fathers at the delicate age of early puberty; they were both

In all these literary works, the myth of the twin/double is constantly being reinterpreted. The literary double from the end of the 18th century is the consequence of the reflection of all the levels of our personality which we can no longer control, and represents a *psychological interiorization* of a so-far mainly mythological topic. The latter grows even more specific with the introduction of psychoanalysis, which scientifically postulates the existence of a twin within each ego, a so-called second ego, as real and in no way hypothetical or fictional. Thus, the theme of a double, treated in great theoretical detail by Otto Rank, is suddenly open to completely new ways of interpretation. The necessary role of duality for the foundation of identity is here again revealed, although, in comparison to the myth, in a completely different epistemological context. According to Lacan, ego is established in relation to his mirror image, while the constitution of subject depends on the Other, and it is the belief of many contemporary theoreticians and philosophers, including Bakhtin, Lévinas, Derrida and Spivak, that personal and collective identity can only be constituted in relation to the Other.

And it is this very context – namely the fact that ego is not a complete monad, but rather a double entity, divided within, its identity necessarily relational, i.e. dependent on the relation to the Other (as a last resort always to the Other within, to an individual's inner double)⁵ – that represents the other level of Kovačič's relation to the twin/double myth. In fact, Kovačič's entire literary opus, an autobiographical re-actualization of the myth of duality, is deeply and closely intertwined with the question of identity. To list but a few examples: "I is somebody else", writes the author in his allusion to Rimbaud and Lacan in *Five Fragments*, or—in the same novel—"man is not created from one piece and the soul is equally fragmented as the body, which for example spews blood from the lungs, while the

born in Switzerland; their writing is autobiographically oriented; they both had traumatic childhood experiences from the boarding school; they both constantly deal in their works with the problem of foreignness and lack of identity. (For further elaboration cf. Virk 1997: 103 pp.)

⁵ This dialectics seems to be perfectly described (exactly in Kovačič's sense) by the following statement of Derek Attridge: "In fact (...), when I encounter alterity, I encounter not the other as such (how could I?) but the remolding of the self that brings the other into being as, necessarily, no longer entirely other" (Attridge 2004: 24).

indigestion functions remain intact" (Kovačič 1985a: 171). Or in *Dust*: "The ancients say that there are two people inside one man ..." (Kovačič 1988: 37); in *Crystal Time*: "We all live in the culmination of a double life" (Kovačič 1990: 61); in *Newcommers*: "I felt the devil inside ... he jumped over entire days and stayed ahead of me, as a chess knight ... and when he would stand on the field, he remounted, in order to play a trick on me" (Kovačič 1984: 275); in *Migrations*: "At that moment, somebody inside me moved, somebody I did not know, but who somehow managed to fill me up beneath the skin, right to the end of my toes" (Kovačič 1974: 32); this work also describes his childhood trauma, when he would soil his bed each night as a six year old in a medical facility, in a constant battle between his two egos, the good and the bad: "At first I would talk to myself, then to someone inside my shoulder, in one of my legs or even someone who sat next to my bed or in a lighted room ...; I begged him not to let me soil the bed again that night, to warn me in advance, to wake me, throw me out of the bed" (ib. 12), this of course never happens, since his other inner-self prefers to tease him on purpose, exactly as the left Janez does to the right Janez in *A Tale of a Two-Headed Son*.

This inner duality is the source of his relentless identity self-examination: "Who am I? I asked myself ... I did not use to be this, as far as I could see and hear myself. Not in this silly disguise, not with this verbiage on my tongue ... Who was I? ... Who is this? Where am I? ... Suddenly I was nowhere ... As if a cave opened beneath my feet ... I was nothing, yes ... a nothing, a zero", asserts Kovačič in *Newcomers* (Kovačič 1985b: 227). And in *Dust*: "I have never been identified. I have never and nowhere been myself ... Anyone could mark the beginning and the end of their life with the motto: Who is it that can tell me who I am? (*King Lear*)" (Kovačič 1985: 34). For Kovačič especially, this uncertainty about his identity is of course no coincidence, but is—as for example with many contemporary postcolonial writers and theoreticians—connected to the writer's life experience of a lack of any form of collective identity. Kovačič was born in Switzerland to a Slovene father and a German mother. They spoke German at home, and when he was ten years old, were deported to Slovenia on the eve of WWII. Being a child from the social margin, living in a foreign language environment, and resented for the German occupation of Slovenia at the time, he was unable to identify completely with any community, thus becoming (in a way for the rest

of his life) a universal outcast. He wrote autobiographic stories and novels on life in the social margin and as somebody who spent his life writing in Slovene while dreaming and thinking (according to his own statements) in German, he gradually developed a unique style, a kind of a hybrid, in-between Slovene with drops of German syntax, a language which could best express his hybrid in-between, i.e. virtually impossible identity. Thus, he claims in *Dust*: "When I am out of my wits, I am most together" (Kovačič 1985: 106), and in an interview describes himself with: "Imagine having split in two; one part lives, walks, eats, makes love, has problems, while the other one only contemplates, sometimes with hostile love, other times through analysis, sometimes by merely writing down these facts and his confessed states, and sometimes observing him as a form of mental operation. But both parts are always united as one" (Pibernik 1983: 116).

The short story *A Tale of a Two-Headed Son*, which is undoubtedly an important contribution to the reception history of the ancient myth, at the same time represents its reinterpretation in line with the contemporary individual and his feeling of self-identity. It is true, that Kovačič's story quite obviously refers to the Slovene nation-building project; but it should in no way be viewed merely as an allegory of a certain state in Slovene political history, but also as a representation of the in-between non-monic contemporary subjectivity. Such an existential in-between state, a split in two or more identities is probably felt stronger, and thus in some way or other put into words, by those, living on some kind of border, margin, in some form of exile. But on the other hand, as an archetypal trait, it seems to be largely present in almost every contemporary individual.

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Margaret Atwood's Re-creation of the Philomel myth in 'Nightingale'

RAMA KUNDU

'...the story of the story of the story...'

Myth is what Steiner calls the 'code of instantaneous recognition'¹. Myth still remains 'the story of the story of the story...' which can immediately stir recognition and evocation through the recognized allusions and accumulated associations. The myths, as Geoffrey Miles rightly points out, need not be any fixed code (Miles 1999: 4); instead their interpretations can always vary with varying periods and writers. The myths, thus re-employed across spaces and times, come to manifest themes and preoccupations of different cultures and ages.

When an author rewrites an ancient myth in the 21st century it is of course a new text, which is nevertheless enriched by all the old associations and significances that accumulate around it in its various prior versions through the ages. A new interpretation thus does not necessarily cancel the old ones, but rather involves a process of palimpsestic re-layering of interpretations and evocations. Margaret Atwood's brief crystal-like prose-piece, 'Nightingale', – rewriting the ancient Philomel myth – can be considered in this light.

In one of her series of the Empson Lectures (published as *Negotiating with the Dead* 2002) Atwood underscores this process of layering upon a text of the past:

¹ Quoted in Miles 1999: 3.

All writers learn from the dead. As long as you continue to write, you continue to explore the work of writers who have preceded you; you also feel judged and held to account by them. But you don't learn only from writers – you can learn from ancestors in all their forms. Because the dead control the past, they control the stories, and also certain kinds of truth... – so if you are going to indulge in narration, you'll have to deal, sooner or later, with those from previous layers of time. Even if that time is only yesterday, it isn't now. It isn't the *now* in which you are writing. (Atwood 2002: 178).

The author herself turns to this *sur-now* in her lyrical sketch, 'Nightingale', included in *The Tent* (2006), – her collection of 'fictional essays'². Atwood demonstrates here what Geoffrey Miles defines as the "combination of simple 'instantaneous recognition' and complex and multiple meanings" which, according to Miles, "makes classical mythology a continually popular resource for writers" (Miles 1999: 4). Miles shows with illustrative references to the cross-countries/ages treatment of three myths in particular – the musician, the sculptor, the lovers – i.e., Orpheus, Pygmalion, Venus-Adonis respectively – "how the treatment of each myth shifts with changing literary fashions, moral values, and intellectual concerns" (ib. 5).

There are several points of correspondence between the two popular ancient myths of singers – Philomel and Orpheus; in both we have: (i) dismemberment – by women under frenzy; (ii) mutilation and survival through art – tongue chopped off, yet finding voice by merging into nature, i.e. being a bird; head chopped off – yet finding a voice in the flowing river; small consolation, though; (iii) birth of art/music/creativity out of pain/loss.

However, there is a basic difference between the foci of the two myths. Philomel's is necessarily the story of the plight of a woman, whereas Orpheus's is the story of a man. There is nothing romantic in Philomel's situation which is a gory tale of crude lust, violent torture involving rape, mutilation, mad revenge, and finally murder; this is in stark contrast to the lyrical sadness of Orpheus's romantic love. Atwood brings out precisely this victimized woman's voice/point of view through her first person narrator in 'Nightingale'. Indeed, Atwood

² A genre that had been pioneered by Borges in his *Labyrinths*.

can be placed among the late 20th century women writers in whose hands myth writing received a new dimension; these writers often turn to myth-adaptations, in which they allow the women characters of the myth to speak.³ Margaret Atwood herself gave Eurydice a voice in her Orpheus poems⁴, re-told the Odysseus-Circe tale from Circe's point of view, and summarized the crux of the *Iliad* from Helen's perspective (in *The Tent*), in addition to her rewriting of the *Odyssey*, as *The Penelopiad* (2005), or Penelope's story. In 'Nightingale' the author re-tells the story of Philomel from the hapless girl's point of view. This is also consistent with the rest of Atwood's fictional oeuvre, in which a common theme is the woman's separation from, and loss of, her own child, – her complete lack of rights over her own body, as well as over the baby borne and reared by this body; one may recall the extremely painful stories of the girl narrator of *Surfacing* (1972), or of 'Offred' in *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985).

Atwood's treatment of the familiar myth of Philomel in 'Nightingale' is neither allegorical, nor the "merely sensuous"⁵ (*à la* Bush) romantic narrative about mythological personae amidst some idyllic landscape or gorgeous decorative setting; instead she cryptically retells the ancient tale in its barest minimum while layering it with subtle nuances of meanings and suggestions.

The ancient story attains a lyrical intensity in Atwood's hand in course of her bare narration. The stark sketch she draws is resonant with allusive echoes. Among the various versions of the myth of Philomela Atwood's brief prose-poem seems, at a first reading, to have specifically followed Robert Graves word for word. This is different from Ovid's more familiar version in which Philomel's tongue is cut off by Tereus, the lustful betrayer. In Robert Graves's version, which meticulously follows authentic Hellenic sources, it is Procne, the elder sister of Philomel and wife of Tereus, whose tongue is cut off, and who sends the embroidered message to her sister.

Anyway, the textuality of her text has been unmistakably and deliberately projected by Atwood. This is the major device she has used

³ Hilda Doolittle *Helen in Egypt*, Carol Ann Duffy's 'Mrs Midas' (1994), for instance.

⁴ "Orpheus". Selected Poems II. Poems Selected and New 1976–1986. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.

⁵ Bush, Douglas. *Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry* (1937). Cambridge: MA., 1969. p. xxii.

to exploit the familiar associations of an old story precisely towards highlighting the uniqueness of her own treatment of the same. Even as she strikes certain fine departures from the source in her adaptation, what is interesting is that these departures are made from the very premise of a reflexive textuality, which gives them a particular edge; her narrator persona does not forget her textuality, nor does she allow the reader to forget it either. The narrative voice in Atwood's sketch consciously situates herself in another previous text – 'At the end of the story...' ; but then she adds her own twist to the old tale by inserting, – 'At the end of the story he killed us both' (138). Thus the myth is overlaid by new content and perception. We know this is not the end of the story in the Greek myth. In the original tale Tereus could not kill them, though he was set to do it, because of divine intervention. Yet the murder of the two sisters could be quite a possibility – in fact, the most likely – considering the situation of the disempowered women in the clutch of a brutal autocratic patriarch. Atwood's departure thus helps to further highlight the grim cruel reality of the two sisters' predicament. So the 'end' of 'the story', as narrated by Atwood's Philomel, appears to be a more plausible, realistic version layered upon the myth. By making the end plausible Atwood further brings out the latent gruesomeness of the story.

Another instance of Atwood's creative departure from the source is the age of her Philomel. The narrator is no more the teenage girl of the myth but a lonely old woman who is visited at night by dead people, and takes it as a matter of course. "By the time you're my age this happens more frequently" (133). The narrator seems to have aged increasingly – from the teenage girl of the source tale to an old woman and finally reveals herself as a dead woman. The way she narrates her story implies the assumption that everybody, i.e., any or every reader, must have been familiar with the bare outlines of her story. So now she can afford to attempt a little playful defamiliarization, and thereby further underscore/highlight/bring out some latent meanings. So she insists: "*It's only a story now* and I'm too old to listen to it" (137; emphasis added).

Again, in the text which is cast in the form of a monologue the narrator seems to be struggling to come out of the acutely painful memory of an unbearable experience. Adapting Philomel's voice, she appeals to the shadow visitor, i.e., Procne: 'I wish you'd leave me alone, I say. It's over, it's long ago. You're dead now and he's dead,

and there's nothing I can do." (137) However, before long even this illusion of old age is dispelled by the claim that she now actually belongs to the dead.

Indeed the author superbly uses the textuality of her people and events – with her own fine twists alongside – in order to deliberately blur any possible frontier between reality and fictionality/textuality, as she also erases the boundary between life and death/after-life and between realism and magic realism.

Initially the narrator deliberately lures us into an illusion as if it were an encounter between the dead and living, though at the end it appears that both the persons engaged in the dialogic have been long dead. The piece opens casually with an oblique glance at the other-world, spirits of dead people visiting the living one, the past visiting the present (perhaps a way of defining myth as well). The visits from the dead are not supposed to surprise either the narrator or the reader. In the anthology (*The Tent*) which is about old age, death, endings, the story 'Nightingale' opens befittingly with a most beautiful sentence: "People die, and then they come back at night when you're asleep." However, they seem to carry home disturbing or sad messages.

At another level, again, the narrator attains a mythical status beyond death and mortality; she emerges to have become part of a circularity/immortality/ interminability – of 'the story of the story of the story' (138). The stark brief sentences are made to carry the weight of some richly ambivalent utterances which are throbbing with resonance of loaded ideas. For instance, as the narrator says she is too old to listen to the story, Procne says, 'You're never too old' (137). Does this suggest the immortality of the artist achieved through pain as well as interminability of the suffering, or the circularity of the myth? The "long liquid song, a *high requiem*, the story of the story of the story" (138) – that the two bird sisters sing at the end – also automatically calls up Keats's "immortal bird".

The author uses the typical mythical motif of metamorphosis to further wash off the dividing line between the real and the fictional, and carry us to the magic realist world of fantasy. Metamorphosis is common in the ancient myths. Humans are transformed into subhumans; even gods too opt for similar transformation. Zeus takes the shape of swan or bull to have the woman he desires. But whereas for the divine the transformation is optional and temporary, for the humans it is

generally permanent and imposed, though it can be either punishment or rescue.

Philomel is also a myth of metamorphosis, which brings us close to the domain of magic realism. Atwood does not treat the myth as absurd or useless hackneyed repetition in the Plato-Addison-Larkin tradition.⁶ Neither does she treat it as allegorical as was often done in the medieval Christian tradition of allegoric-moral interpretation and continued through the Renaissance, nor as Hellenism like the romantics or symbol like the modernists. She rather places it in the artistic domain of magic realism. In her treatment the well-known mythical personae appear as both real and non-real as the metamorphosis takes place on the plane of magic realism. Towards the end of her nightly visits Procne "starts turning into a bird, the way she always does, and when I look down the same thing is happening to me. This is when I remember running, running away from him" (137-8). The implication remains that this is only in dream; in the actual case they had not been able to escape him by running: "at the end of the story he killed us both".

Indeed Atwood tries to make the magic realistic sequence of metamorphosis plausible by making it take place only in a dream, at the end of which the dreamer presumably gets back her human shape, albeit the reader cannot be certain if the dreamer is a living person or a ghost for that matter. The brief narrative is told, as if from within a dream, thus throwing a façade of plausibility over the magical sequence and supernatural elements of the myth. The age-old device of dream helps the author to construct this fantasy environment. The entire narration seems to have taken place inside a twilight domain of dream.

The dream also becomes a metaphor for the obscurity, the distance, the mist of times and ages, the moss of obscurity, accumulated by an ancient myth over centuries.

It is again a 'death's dream kingdom' into which the story entices us at the very start: "People die, and then they come back at night when you're asleep.... In the dream you know they're dead: funny thing is, they know it too" (133). "They want you to see them; that's the point. They want you to know they're still around and they can't be forgotten

⁶ Reference is being made to Larkin's derisive term "myth-kitty", in line with Plato and Addison: "To me... the whole of classical and biblical mythology means very little, and I think that by using them today not only fills poems full of dead spots but dodges the poet's duty to be original"(Larkin 1983: 69)

or dismissed.” (135). Is it the ‘burden of memory’ that operates behind the genesis of a myth or folktale?

In dream characters attain a strange visionary power by means of entering the supernatural world of the dead (turned ghosts), and moving freely between this world and the other one. “And *I know in the dream* that I’m dead too, because at the end of the story he killed us both.” (138). Evidently, even in the dream the persona does not forget her embedded textuality – “the story”.

Furthermore, this is an infinitely repeated dream, and thus through repetition it attains a kind of circularity as well. The dreamer is also destined to attain a kind of immortality through the very poignancy of her pain, grief, frustration, molestation, a wasted life.

Atwood subtly uses the narrative form of monologue to underscore a feminist perception. As she rewrites the familiar myth in the form of a monologue with Philomel as the first person speaker/narrator and the ghost of her now dead sister as auditor, the monologue acquires by degrees the dimension of a dialogic foregrounding the interaction of the two sisters. Finally, however, the two nearly merge into the same woman in the course of the brief narrative; this happens through their shared ‘Grief’ and synchronic metamorphosis. It can be noted that the dialogue of the sisters, while being reported by the narrator, is given without the usual punctuation marks, suggesting thereby a fluid interflow of voices. It seems significant that in Atwood’s brief piece the two sisters eventually cease to have separate identities. Both have been subjected to the same cruelty and persecution, and they bear the burden of the same memory. The story ends with the two sisters flying through the window, one after the other out into the moonlit night forest:

We land on a branch. It’s at this moment, in the dream,
that I begin to sing. A long liquid song, a high requiem,
the story of the story of the story. Or is the voice hers?
Hard to tell. (138)

It is not mentioned in Atwood’s sketch that the two sisters are turned into two different species of birds. Instead their voices become identical – indistinguishable – from one another. “...I begin to sing... Or is the voice hers? Hard to tell” (138). Incidentally, the notion of a joint identity of Philomel and Procne is also supported by an

observation of Graves: "Procne and Philomela, who turned into birds, were jointly called Atthis..." (Graves 1958: 323).

Philomel is not the enterprising mythopoeic hero/ine, venturing out on a challenging quest, but the passive suffering victim. She is painfully alienated; at the same time she finds her double or extension in another similarly alienated and victim figure, a sister figure, both betrayed, violated, mutilated by the same man. This takes us directly to the heart of the feminist message of sisterhood that makes the foundation of the story. In this context one can refer to Atwood's poem about the silent "unknown twin", who waits inside *her* brain, and gives solidity to *her* utterances.⁷ The shadow in the mirror is of the "unknown", yet instinctively known, by being a "twin"; it is mysterious, yet part of the other twin's own self.

The elaborate anonymity of Atwood's personae also seems part of a feminist semiotics in the context. Only one name is used from the source myth – that is Procne; there is no other name; and Procne can be considered an extension of Philomel or vice-versa in the present context, both being victims of the same situation; in the various versions of the myth too the respective roles seem to be shifting and interchanging between the two names – Procne and Philomel. No other name appears in Atwood's text, – neither the victims' father's nor their husband's; it is only 'he', – implying an abstract male idea.

To the feminist perception one major thrust of the myth can be the issue of silencing the woman⁸, which apparently constitutes Atwood's emphasis. The author would call back to a footnote in Graves; in addition to reifying the textuality, this overt allusion brings out Atwood's emphasis on the issue of disempowerment through silencing, robbing of the female voice. Atwood exploits the small hint in Graves' footnote regarding the possibility of a misrepresentation by

⁷ She is "The Signer"

In an area of darkness behind my head
stands a woman dressed in black,
... my unknown twin. ...

In her hands, deft as a knitter's
but quicker, my words turn solid,

Morning

⁸ The Indian folklore about Khana, a girl of extraordinary knowledge and intelligence, whose tongue was cut off by her in-laws because she knew too much.

simultaneously using and questioning it. Graves writes: "The cutting-out of Procne's tongue misrepresents a scene showing a prophetess in a trance, induced by the chewing of laurel-leaves. ... and the tongue which seems to have been cut out is in fact a laurel-leaf, handed her by the priest who interprets her wild babblings" (ib. 167). This is to be read side by side with the dialogue between the sisters in Atwood's prose-poem; Procne mourns in her dream visit to Philomel:

'I only wish he hadn't cut out my tongue.'

That is a lie, I said. He never did that. You made the decision not to speak, is all. The tongue part of the story is a misreading of a temple wall painting, that's what people say now. Those things were not tongues, they were laurel leaves for the priestess, so she could hallucinate, and prophesy, and – You and your archeology, said Procne. He cut out my tongue, all right. He knew I'd tell stories.' (136)

This is giving an oblique glance at some possible dismissive chauvinistic interpretation of the grim tragedy under the pretext of 'realistic logic'. The claims of such dispassionate argument are nevertheless squashed through the voice of Atwood's Procne who insists on the disclosure of the horrifying cruelty that had been perpetrated.

She had sought out a way to overcome that horrible hurdle. The artist is not only the singer in the present case; the artist is also an author who can weave a script with golden thread on silk, and thus can achieve maximum meaning through the minimum expression. Procne thus, according to Graves' version (which is followed by Atwood), becomes emblematic of a persecuted artist who, even after being scarred and silenced, still manages to find a visual device for expression and communication. Whereas Ovid's Philomel weaves the entire story in purple on a white background, Atwood's Procne (following Graves) sends one cryptic communiqué, "by weaving a secret message into the pattern of a bridal robe... 'Procne is among the slaves' " (Graves 1958: 167). The mode of communiqué used by Procne – seems significant when considered in the light of Adrienne Rich's poem, 'Aunt Jennifer's Tigers'.

Embroidery/weaving/knitting, which once involved a compulsive subjugation of women to useless waste of time and artistry,⁹ has been perceived by some recent feminists as inscriptional devices, or alternative ways of expression for the subjugated; Adrienne Rich in her poem, 'Aunt Jennifer's Tigers', imagines embroidery as a way of desperate articulation achieved by a woman through the very futile work to which she has been subjected by patriarchy. Thus Aunt Jennifer attains a kind of immortality through the fearless icons she "made" during her years of domestic slavery. The reader may also recall Penelope's strategic weaving.

Seen from the feminist angle, the final metamorphosis of Procne and Philomel offers what can at best be called an ambivalent solution. True, the transformation into a bird is a beautiful change, and no gothic or Kafkaesque metamorphosis. However, the fact remains that the female body is an object of violence – this is an eternal reality; in the present case it had been the victim of rape and mutilation; being transformed into bird necessarily suggests a reduction of the body – sending the message that until and unless the reduction takes place *she* has no respite. They are just saved, but at what cost! Anyway, one must admit this is not the grotesque, ugly, fearsome transformations of the female body as seen in romantic literature-- a snake turning into a woman ('Lamia') or a woman turning into a snake ('Christabel').

Jeannine Hall Gailey in her series of poems adapting the myth of the two sisters [which forms the connecting thread in her volume *Becoming the Villainess* (2005)¹⁰] writes: they are "not saved – changed, it's not the same thing" (in 'Remembering Philomel'). In another poem 'Philomel's Rape' she writes: "This conversion was not of your choosing, and the somewhat tenuous 'gift,' your song, not as healing as you hoped." While noting the 'empowerment' through revenge she cannot overlook the sense of bitter loss and remorse. In the poem 'Procne and Philomel, at the End' Procne mourns: "Only nightmares pursue me,/ sometimes my son's blood on my hands/ I can't understand my own voice..."

⁹ "The family was half ashamed to have it known that she was not just a young lady like the others doing her embroidery." So did Mrs Oliphant write about Jane Austen.

¹⁰ www.amazon.com/Becoming-Villainess-Jeannine-Hall-Gailey/dp/0974326437 - 199k -

Procne also represents the mourning mother figure, an archetypal mythic figure – from Demeter to Mother Mary; and in the myth both Philomel and Procne share this maternal sorrow for the loss of an innocent child. This is perhaps the most unutterable sorrow, a grief beyond all words; therefore indicated only through a gesture. "... she lifted up her hands. They were wet. They glistened. Our son..." (137).

The story ends with a haiku-like touch.

'A man standing underneath our tree says, *Grief*.' (138)

The one-word abstraction which seems to be a reductive definition can be considered both as a note of sad sarcasm, and a hint of stark sublimation reached through and beyond unutterable sorrow. To Atwood's perception Philomel's story seems to be too grim to allow any scope for sentimentalizing or romanticizing. The bird here is at best an ambiguous signifier, and should not be subjected to reductive reading; because becoming the bird also means losing the original identity. After this they come to emblematised impersonal music, as the man under the tree defines, 'Grief'. This is abstraction. The man under the tree can be considered in the light of the obsession of conventional art with the suffering woman; the suffering itself being impersonalized into a form of abstract aesthetic pleasure. Or does this denote a process of sublimation, of the transformation of all personal suffering into the impersonal aesthetics of 'grief'?

The final metamorphosis – from earth-trudging mortal to sky-flying bird – can also be considered in the light of the myth of ascent as formulated by Frye, a fellow Canadian: The original myth provides a vertical axis on which Atwood's mythic heroine can be placed. Atwood's Philomel, rises/ascends in a dream sequence towards the end of her story. In his study of the 'Structure of Romance' Northrop Frye observed:

From the beginning the poetic imagination has inhabited a middle earth. Above it is the sky with whatever it reveals or conceals: below it is a mysterious place of birth and death from whence animals and plants proceed, and to which they return. There are therefore four primary narrative movements in literature. These are, first, the descent from a higher world; second, the descent to a lower world; third, the ascent from a lower

world; and, fourth, the ascent to a higher world. All stories in literature are complications of, or metaphorical derivations from, these four narrative radicals. (Frye 1976: 97)

Atwood tells her story following the simple bare style of oral narrators, in an apparently matter-of-fact tone. But it is the simplicity of impassioned sad poetry in which the sadness drips "from previous layers of time" (Atwood 2002: 178) as the author makes her superbly imaginative-interrogative and creative 'negotiation with the dead'.

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On Some Aspects of Transgressing the Frame and the Boundary in Umberto Eco's *Baudolino*: The Transmythologizing of Myth and the Transconstruction of Fabula

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The aim of the present article is to discuss some problems of narrative tensions created by Umberto Eco in his fourth novel *Baudolino* (2000), concerning the dialectic of mythologizing and fabula aspects. Therefore Juri Lotman's ideas on frame and boundary (particularly in "The composition of a literary work" which forms part of *The Structure of the Poetic Text*) will be applied to Eco's novel, especially as the consistency and/or shifting of the fabula go, comparing and confronting the mentioned concepts with some of Eco's own ideas on artistic narrative, primarily with those ones which concern false and true paratexts (based on his analysis of E. A. Poe's story *Arthur Gordon Pym* in *Six walks in the Fictional Woods*). Therefore the first part of this article deals with some theoretical aspects. The second part deals with the peculiarity of the narrative structure of *Baudolino*. The third part centres on the problematic of the boundary between the mythical and the historical in Eco's novel.

The hypothesis of the study is that in *Baudolino* Eco demythologizes myth and deconstructs fabula in order to reconstruct both on a different level. Therefore I have preferred to use the terms "transmythologize" and "tranconstruct" instead.

1.1. The mythological axis and the fabula axis in Juri Lotman's study on the composition of a literary work

According to Lotman a work of art constitutes a finite model of the infinite world (Lotman 2006: 354)¹. Modelling the infinite object (reality) with the means of a finite text, a work of art substitutes with its space not that part of life which it represents, but life in its totality (ib. 356).² In this respect Lotman's statement is not different from Aristotle's idea that art does not represent so much individual than universal phenomena (*Poetics* 1451 b1). Therefore in the plot of a literary work two aspects may be discerned: the mythologizing aspect, according to which a text models the whole universe, and the fabula aspect which reflects some episode of reality. There are some artistic texts which are related to reality only on the mythological principle and they are myths proper, whereas texts of only a fabula aspect are inconceivable, for even most objective fragments drawn into the sphere of art are liable to become universal models (therefore mythologizing reality, representing it in its totality), as something has been left out of their objectivity anyway, as is the case of *cinéma- vérité*, for example (ib. 357).

Therefore, according to Lotman, the mythologizing aspect is first and foremost connected with fixing the **frame**, separating the inside and the outside, whereas the fabula aspect tends to break it. Contemporary art is based, according to Lotman, primarily on the tension between the two (ib. 356–357). The frame which defines what is inside a work of art and what not is therefore of utmost importance. Like Aristotle in the *Poetics* (1450 b21-b34), Lotman discusses the totality of a work of art as something which has a beginning and an end and the middle part. Actually Lotman requires for his notion of the frame the beginning and the end, but of course we may presume that it comprises the middle part between the two. These two elements – the beginning and the end – carry both the mythologizing function and the coding function, establishing the mode of the artistic work. The coding

¹ *The Structure of the Poetic Text* (Структура художественного текста) was first published in Moscow in 1970.

² Let it be reminded in comparison that for Schlegel works of art were finite outside forms of the infinite inside. Cf e.g. Athenäums-Fragment 238 which discusses transcendental poetry.

function of the beginning usually provides information on the system in which the text is encoded: its genre, style and cultural and artistic typology which a reader should bear in mind when decoding the text. Of course sometimes other parts may carry this function and compensate the initial (lack of) information. The mythologizing function is carried both by the beginning and by the end. Something is called into being and something is resolved forever (Lotman 2006: 358–365). Of course art, especially contemporary art may provide unfinished works (Laurence Sterne's *Sentimental Voyage*), more endings than one (John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman*: my example, Ü.P.), retarded prologues (in Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* it is provided in chapter 7) etc.

We also learn that between the beginning and the end, the textual space in a work of art is organized semiotically by means of spatial deictics ("above" – "below" etc), but also by other means which in an artistic text often tend to become semantically spatial ("good" – "bad", "mortal" – "immortal", etc). These spatial rules are then either followed or ignored, adhering to or breaking the "cultural norm" or/and the expectancy of the reader, because of the essential feature of a work of art – its creator's freedom (ib. 365–384).

This is a most relevant feature of a work of art and its role is to liberate the world from determination. Thereby the concept of **boundary** becomes crucial. Boundary according to Lotman divides the space of the text into two non intersecting subspaces (e.g. the "proper" and the "strange", the "dead" and the "living" etc.). The characters either belong to this or to that subspace. Artistic freedom, however, foresees the transgressing of boundaries at least by some character, and such transgression becomes the main demarcation line between facts and events.

An artistic plot consists of events, not of facts. An event in a text is movement across the boundaries of a semantic field, a deviation from the norm (ib. 386–392). Dante-the character travels in the yonder world, Tristan and Isolde take refuge in the forest, alien to a medieval value system, etc. An event is something which has happened, although it need not have happened. The smaller the possibility of an event to happen, the more information it carries, and the higher position it occupies on the scale of plot suspense. There are characters who do not break the norms and those who do (Aeneas, Dante, Rastignac etc.), stepping from one semantic field to the so-called "anti-field". The right

for an abnormal behaviour is either possessed by a mythical character or a trickster, but in the more complex and usually also in a great many modern texts theoretically by any character which provides the artistic text with one of its specific features – the question of (the diversity of) viewpoints (ib. 406–418), also the mobility and complexity of a character itself (ib. 418–432).

I shall next compare these basic points of Lotman's approach with some of Eco's own views on narrative expressed in *Lector in Fabula* and *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*.

1.2. Eco's views concerning the problematic of fabula in comparison with Lotman's mythologising and fabula aspects

For example in 4.2. of *Lector in fabula* (Eco 1979: 69ff) Eco parts from van Dijk's distinction in narrative, "natural narrative" and "artistic narrative", according to which the latter differs from the former because it considers individuals and facts attributed to possible worlds, different of those of our experience. I think this distinction corresponds to Lotman's distinction of facts and events. The artistic plot is based upon events which need not have happened in reality. According to Eco an artistic text also distinguishes itself from a contrafactual text, like "what would have happened, if...". In an artistic narrative the reader is invited through a specific introductory formula to understand that he should not ask himself whether the facts narrated are true or false, it suffices that they be verisimilar (and not even that, e.g. in a fantasy narrative) (1). This statement of Eco's corresponds to Lotman's coding function which we usually find at the beginning of a work of art, but not necessarily. And surely the "facts" which need not be true are events according to Lotman.

The second characteristic of Eco's is a bit strange, for it surely pertains to any narrative: some individuals will be selected and presented by means of descriptions which would then adhere to them: their names and other properties (2). I think it is a somewhat problematic point, for surely properties are more stable in a non-artistic text, for in a fantasy text they might change. But of course Eco has in mind those textual characteristics by which the reader would not confuse identities. Anyway it should be remembered that some genres

play upon confused identities. This is the case of the so-called substitution comedies where characters are meant to lose track of identities (e.g. Renaissance plays), whereas the audience is well aware of their confusing and (re)discovering them.

Characteristics 3, 4, 5 read (in a broad outline) as follows: the sequence of actions is more or less localised spatially and temporally (3); the sequence of actions is considered final (there's a beginning and an end) (4); the text starts with a certain state and gives the reader the possibility to ask each time what would happen next (5); the entire course of events may be expressed in a series of macropropositions which provides the backbone of the text – the fabula.

On the background of Lotman's notions we may well discern the importance of the beginning and the end (4), the semiotic and logically deictic organisation of the text (3), the finiteness of an artistic text (4), the very fact that the artistic plot is based on events (with sticking to rules and breaking them) rather than facts (5).

But there is one essential feature in which Eco's ideas of 1979 seem to diverge from Lotman's of 1970 which concerns the problem of the limits of fabula, i.e. the mythologizing in relation to fabula. If Eco 1979 only states that the role of the fabula is to guarantee the succession of textual events, deriving them from but not necessarily following the linear manifestation of the text (Eco 1979: 70–71), then Lotman brings in a specific feature of fabula, or rather its specificity in relation to the mythologizing: if the mythologizing aspect models the world and sets the frame, the fabula aspect tends to break it.

However in his *Six walks in the Fictional Woods* (1994), Eco's analysis concerning the questions of **paratext** in relation to fabula in his study on the problematic of the Model author as a narrating strategy or textual instructions to the Model reader, especially in his accounts of Poe's *Arthur Gordon Pym* and Nerval's *Sylvie*, definitely deal with the problematic of narrative tensions. Eco does not use the concept of frame, but the analysis of what should be considered paratext in relation to fabula is exactly the case, for fabula is something which should be reconstructed by the Model reader by help of introductions of the Model author, whereby the bulk and range and the limits of the fabula as a final product need not correspond to the initial data provided by the Model author.

Let me recall the problematic shortly: there exist two different editions of *Arthur Gordon Pym* (1837 and 1838). The first was

published under the name of Poe and the second without a name but with a preface signed by A. G. Pym and an explanation that in the first variant Poe's name was just used to give the story more credibility. The preface then appears as a paratext by the true author and narrator Pym, till the reader gets to know of his sudden death, which deconstructs the fabula which was set as a trap and introduces another author, a Mr X, who has used Pym as false real author and narrator with a false paratext, whereas the real paratext is the final note of this Mr X who has declared the sudden death of Pym. Of course "the empirical author is Poe, who invented a fictitious real person, Mr X, who speaks of a false real person, Mr Pym, who in his turn acts as the narrator of a fictional story (the only embarrassing thing is that these fictitious persons speak of the real Mr Poe as if he were an inhabitant of their fictitious universe)" (Eco 1994: 20).

Another example of a kind of "paratext", or rather a turn in narrative strategy in a kind of **intext**, is an intervention in the first-person narrator's (which Eco calls Je- rard) account in Gerard Nerval's *Sylvie* by the Model author (called Nerval by Eco) in the form of a sentence which invites the reader to follow the narrator in his journey of reminiscence, very much like Dante-the author calls upon his reader to sharpen his eye when following Dante-the character's steps in the *Divine Comedy*.

Eco's own observations on paratext and false paratext, and also model author's intext, when deposited onto Lotman's approach of frame and the dialectics of the mythologizing in conflict with fabula come in handy when analysing *Baudolino* – a novel which does not only discuss the knots of the mythical and historical, but which appears to be a novel of pinpointing mythologizing, demythologizing and transmythologizing aspects in narrative.

2. The peculiarity of the narrative structure in *Baudolino*

It is evident that Eco's *Baudolino* is not a novel in the traditional sense with a clear beginning, middle part and end. *Baudolino* invites the reader to consider the question of the frame (in Lotman's terms) or paratextual and intextual features in the interplay with the textual ones (in Eco's terms). The novel comprises a plot in 40 chapters with as many titles (which form paratext), plus a dedication (to *Emmanuele*)

(paratext), plus a table of contents (paratext). The table of contents (at the back of the book³) gives in a uniform way forty times what Baudolino is doing from *Baudolino begins to write* (1), *Baudolino meets Niketas Choniates* (2) to *Baudolino is no more* (40). There is seemingly no preface and no end note, therefore there seems to be one unique and consistent plot on which we might construct a clear-cut fabula, presented by a third-person narrator. But of course it is not so, for the first chapter is a seemingly independent piece of writing, as it is a first- person narrative, allegedly written by a certain Baudolino.

It says that it is a chronicle begun in Regensburg in 1155 by Baudolino, son of Gagliaudo, and then, after an account of many things, among which Baudolino's meeting Friedrich I Barbarossa, his future step-father, it is suddenly interrupted... Is chapter 1 a paratext then and the real story would begin only with chapter 2? Yes and no. It is the first instance where tension is created around the problem of the frame (Lotman's term). For if we stick to the mythologizing axis, whereby the first chapter (and it is limited as the first chapter and final despite its being uncompleted) is a text in its own account, it would be a model of reality in its totality even though it clearly appears to be fragmentary. In fact, we deal with a mythologizing text in a true sense, for Baudolino creates one of the first, if not the very first text ever written in an Italian dialect, which is of course fake, for thus far there is no notion of the existence of such a text. It is clearly a stylisation.

Anyway, this piece of writing, stylisation to a bigger or a smaller degree, (and finite even though not completed) would deposit itself upon the early Italian language and its composing problems in reality (infinite). But the first person narrative as an interrupted written document is at once drawn into the fabula right at the beginning of chapter 2, (after the paratextual title *Baudolino meets Niketas Choniates*) with Niketas' question "What's this?", as he is holding Baudolino's writing in hand. Therefore fabula really breaks the frame, and shifts the real beginning of the story from the first chapter in 1155 to an episode during the fall and devastation of Constantinople by the Venetian during the 4th Crusade in

³ Strangely enough the English translation by W. Weaver does not provide the table of contents which is included in the original. But the titles are of course there at the beginning of each chapter. Also the dedication is missing. In compensation there is the translator's note at the very end which might lead the English reader to think that Mr Eco is a fake author and that the translator, Mr Weaver, is the real one.

1204, whereby the first chapter as a false paratext really transforms into a character's (Baudolino's) intext in the fabula. I think that if a film was made on the basis of the book, it would be the initial episode. "It's my first attempt at writing", answers Baudolino, and we understand that with these words he confirms what we already know by the paratext – the title of chapter 1; that it is the beginning of his chronicle (written as a palimpsest on some other writing, a history dating back to 1143), or rather his life-story, of which he appears to have lost the rest during the escape from the land of priest John somewhere in the East (semantically the mythical subtext, with which I shall deal later), and of which Niketas says he has never heard of.

Therefore fabula in *Baudolino* appears to be shifting the frame (changing the first chapter's quality from that of a paratext into a character's intext) which at once draws the reader's (besides Baudolino's interlocutor Niketas' scepticism from the very first) attention to the conflicts between the questions of modelling reality and the scope and the limits of this model.

I shall leave the question of boundary or the semantic demarcation line within the text or rather between the two subtexts – the historical and the mythical – to the next section of this article and come at once to the ending chapter, to resolve the problem of the frame. Let it only be said that Baudolino is of course (with his companions) the hero (or the trickster) who transgresses boundaries, therefore creating events which are required for an artistic plot (cf with Lotman's notions discussed at 1.1) and which Niketas is eager to listen to. These events actually stand out very clearly on the background of facts which happen to Niketas and Baudolino as they sit at table, or move from one place to another (although some of them tend to become events too).

The final chapter deals with the frame and intextual features in a most intriguing way. Niketas goes to Paphnutios, his blind advisor, who in the previous chapter has deconstructed Baudolino's narrative, making him understand that Emperor Friedrich had not been killed by the Poet, Baudolino's companion who he killed in revenge, but that it had been Baudolino's own, though unwilful fault, a revelation which made Baudolino repent and fast like an oriental monk on a column, until he finally decided to travel back to the Orient, where he allegedly has a wife and a child.

So, after Baudolino has left for the East never to return in chapter 39, Niketas goes to Pahnutios in chapter 40, the title of which (paratext)

states: *Baudolino is no more*. The reader might think that Baudolino is dead. But it is not so. When Niketas tells Paphnutios Baudolino's story, which is clearly, at least partly unbelievable, the question is what he as a historian should do in his chronicle which he is going to write about the fall of Constantinople. Niketas wants the history of his to be credible.

If science allegedly deals with factual knowledge⁴, literature and literary narrative deal with events. Chronicles stand somewhere between history and fiction, for they mainly narrate of events and very often they link the historical to the mythical, as is the case with medieval chronicles. Narrative events are not necessarily factual in the sense that they need to have happened in reality. What is expected is that they should be possible. Aristotle postulated in his *Poetics* that poets and historians differ mainly because of the way in which they treat reality: historians speak of what happened, poets deal with what may happen, what is possible (1451 a16–1451 b1). Elsewhere Aristotle has even maintained that it is better (from artistic purposes to tell a verisimilar lie than an non- verisimilar truth). Baudolino's stories do not seem true to Niketas, moreover Baudolino has declared from the very beginning that he is a liar, with the strange result that many of his lies later begin to circulate among people and become true. Therefore Baudolino is a kind of Demiurgos, creating a good deal of Western cultural history from the invention of the three Magi, to the invention of the stories of the Holy Grail, to the love letters between Abelard and Heloise, to the poems of the Archdeacon of Cologne, etc.).

Paphnutios advises Niketas to scratch Baudolino's testimony out of his chronicle (actually Baudolino had scratched out a history written by his teacher Otto von Friesing, the chronicler of Friedrich Barbarossa, writing his own on it), and besides the unbelievable story of Baudolino also the very realistic account of Genoese and their help to Niketas, "for" – as Paphnutios puts it – "in a great history little truths can be altered so that greater truth emerges" (*Baudolino*: 521). Whose words are these? Are they really Paphnutios'? I have a sneaking suspicion, that we hear the parodying voice of the Model author who uses Paphnutios' voice to express his own standpoints. But it is not clear yet. Their voices still overlap. It could be both.

⁴ For a most interesting piece of writing on truth in myth and science cf Stawinski 2005.

In the very end, however, when Niketas regrets that such a beautiful story, which he has really enjoyed listening (and which is the only orderly structure – accompanied by the fabulous and well ordered meals, of course – within the great chaos of the ravishing of Constantinople, just so as the stories of *Decamerone* stand out as structured order against the death and the chaos of the Florentine pestilence of 1348 in Boccaccio's masterpiece) will remain unknown, Pahnutios says that sooner or later a liar, bigger than Baudolino will appear, and tell the story.

Can Paphnutios, a 12th century man, Niketas Choniates' companion, know of somebody who figures as Mr Umberto Eco on the titlepage of his book and who is the empirical author of this book? Of course he cannot. He does not say that in eight centuries Mr Eco will be that liar, bigger than Baudolino. For it is the Model author who appears in the shape of Pahnutios in order to give his final instructions to the Model reader – to question the interrelations of myth and history, the boundaries of reality, possibility and impossibility, lying and truth, and find out that these boundaries are constantly shifting depending on intentions and viewpoints. That persons and facts may be left out of chronicles “for a bigger truth” and a major credibility even though not exactly these truths and these facts should have been left out or, on the contrary, included for major credibility. Which questions again the boundaries between lying and telling the truth, mythologizing events and narrating facts.

Therefore there is an intertextual (or even paratextual, in broad terms) note at the end of the plot. After the final words of Pahnutios' the empirical author could have as well put an asterisk, with a footnote below: Mr Umberto Eco will choose to write such a story. But of course it would not be the strategy of the Model author who wants the Model reader to understand the text possibly in the following way: the empirical author Mr Umberto Eco has created a fictitious person, a certain Mr X, the biggest liar ever, who has attributed to the real Byzantine chronicler Niketas (who really in his work does not mention Baudolino) the fault of not narrating of Baudolino (who we suspect is a fictitious character), who has narrated to him a most unbelievable story, where – as a matter of fact – a lot of things happen which happened in European history, although the founts of information are known to be others than somebody called Baudolino. And as a matter of fact, just as was the case of Poe as a fictitious character in the

confabulations of Poe's Pym, Eco is being hinted at as a fictitious, possible person in his own book.

Hence the question arises: what is actually the relation of the last chapter to the plot and the fabula? The chapter is part of the plot for sure. But is it also part of the fabula which deals with a third-person narrative which gives account of Baudolino's narration to Niketas? No it is not. That fabula ends with chapter 39. Baudolino's story (told by somebody else in which Baudolino appears as a narrator, so actually there is narration within narration) finishes there. Whereas Baudolino's existence finishes, or is actually denied in chapter 40. If chapter 40 makes part of the fabula, it deconstructs it, as Paphnutios deconstructed Baudolino's story. If it does not belong to the fabula, we have a different narrative. Frame wants Baudolino's story to be a model of reality, of telling a story mixed with lies. It is a perfect model of reality, a finite artistic form deposited on an infinite world. But then, in chapter 40, this story and the character himself are denied their existence altogether. Fabula lengthens and destroys the frame which was previously set. The lengthened fabula tends to destroy the mythologizing aspect of the first 39 chapters altogether, demythologizing its content between the mythical and historical. Until somebody, a Mr X, willed by the empirical author, will save the situation and transmythologize the demythologised with an even lengthier fabula: writing of the writing which did not write the writing which possibly wrote.

3. Baudolino as a character between the mythical and the historical: trespassing the boundary

The semantic structure of Baudolino (ch 2–39) can be divided into two possible subspaces: the historical space and the mythical space. The first space is centred around the historical West-East axis of Rome and Constantinople, offering an enjoyable comparative approach to cultural history, beginning from food and ending with warfare, including also the historical seize of Byzantium by the Crusaders. The second subspace is the mythical East which centres upon the mythical place called Pndapetzim and the mythical war between the White Huns and the Christian bastard nations which form the bulk of the oriental state of Deacon John and the Eunuchs, behind which the mythical realm of priest John should be. The boundary zone between the two is

symbolically represented by the dark forest of Abcasia, the magical stony river of Sambatyon and Aloadin's castle. However the main boundary between the two appears to be temporal which becomes spatial: the death of Emperor Friedrich during the third Crusade which itself is both a historical fact and a mythical event, for the circumstances are not known.

The transgression of the boundary (although it should be said that both subspaces are not marked as clearly as in fairy-tales, for each subspace contains knots of the opposite one, which makes part of the narrative strategy) is carried out by Baudolino the trickster, whose story seems unbelievable to Niketas, not to speak about the present day reader.

In fact Baudolino has two listeners with a completely different encyclopaedic worlds or worlds of orientation to match with possible worlds (cf Eco 1979, ch 8): Niketas, or a medieval man, and the contemporary reader with his contemporary world of orientation. At the same time the Model reader should be the one which is expected to consider the differences of these possible worlds. Therefore the boundary or the dark zone between the mythical and the historical is liable to be shifting. In fact Niketas' world of orientation is that of a medieval man, in whose encyclopaedia wonders make an organic part. The real, the possible and the impossible form an altogether different system. For example the monsters which appear after crossing the dark forest of Abcasia (e.g. the basilisk and the mantichoras and others) may be found in a great many medieval books, including for example Brunetto Latini's encyclopaedia "Trésor". Therefore an educated contemporary reader should consider that though it might be incredible to him, at least theoretically Niketas could have believed these stories. The same goes about the different monsters and bastards of the land of Pndapetzim which appear in medieval travellers' books.⁵ Again there is the theoretical possibility that Niketas might not consider the stories absurd on this basis.

Quite another aspect is of course related to Baudolino's explicit inventions. If Baudolino says that he invented the three Magi from the Orient or the description of the mythical palace of priest John with his companions, this is told so and the reader together with Niketas knows that Baudolino is a liar. Yet there are also Baudolino's implicit inven-

⁵ For monsters and their semiotic peculiarity in the medieval worldview in relation to Eco's book cf Farronato 2003.

tions which are neither disclosed to Niketas nor to the reader, such as the love letters written by Baudolino to Empress Beatrix and hers to him, both from Baudolino's pen, which a well informed reader knows to be the love letters exchanged between Abelard and Heloise.⁶

Anyway, we may say with certainty that the Model author has wished to make the Model reader understand how the boundary between the historical and the mythical is liable to shift, even though not all readers are expected to understand with equal insight the extension and scope of such shifts. Here is another transmythologizing aspect of Eco's book: boundaries are shifted, but no one knows exactly which these boundaries are. The Empirical author of course knows it as far as his literary work goes, but as it is a model of reality, in which he participates, he is not different from the rest. In reality we all participate in the collective illusion and at best be critically apprehensive.

Before coming to conclusions I would also like to indicate some instances of cyclical schemes, characteristic of mythical revival and relevant to the aspect of frame. On the content level individual and collective myths are mostly closed (*ourobros*): Abdul meets his beloved (although in death); Solomon meets his dispersed Jewish tribes (although in death); the Alexandrians return to their city; Kyot and Boron will revive their personal search of the Holy Grail in retelling stories about it, etc. The only problematic case is that of Baudolino's. He has completed one circle from the historical West to the mythical East and back to discover the secret of the Emperor's death. And now he is doing his second circle in order to travel back to the mythical East to his wife and son. A real wife and son in a mythical land? But the real question, from the aspect of revival, is: where is the starting point and what is revived? If he came from the historical West, he would now be – in the mythical East – only halfway through it. If he started from the East, he would have completed it. In the second case he is a mythical figure, and really, as we have seen, Niketas has left him out of history. But then we would never know of him. To make him historical, he should be brought back from the mythical East to the historical West on the narrative plane in *Baudolino*. The end (inexistence) of Baudolino is the beginning (existence) of *Baudolino*.

⁶ This is of course postmodern intertextual play, comparable to Robert Burns' verse line "My love is like a red red rose", attributed to Shakespeare in Stoppard's ineffable "Shakespeare in Love".

Conclusions

Transgressing the boundaries between the mythical and the historical by Baudolino and transgressing the frame by the narrator created by the empirical Umberto Eco are therefore complementary procedures which both question and re-establish boundaries of myth and history.

Therefore Baudolino is the alter ego of Umberto Eco who demythologises myth and deconstructs fabula, therefore transgressing the frame very much so as Baudolino transgresses the boundary. But in doing so he questions and at the same time also paradoxically consolidates the idea of the mythologizing function of any narrative.

As a result, the fabula of a historical novel is transformed into that of narrating the problematic of writing histories, and not necessarily of remote ones. It seems to me that Eco's novel should therefore be considered basically a metanovel, which seems to tell the biggest myth ever: be careful about lying, for your lies (also partaking in those of the others, collective illusion) are likely to become historical truths. For then it will take time and a bigger liar to shake the credibility of such truths.

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The Augustan Myth of Stability and Its Reception in the Twentieth Century: from the Places of Rest to the Territories of the Oppositional

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Following Y. M. Lotman, Jüri Talvet has defined the semiosphere¹ as

the imagined dialoguing 'border' between the biosphere and the noo-sphere (the one determined overwhelmingly by the activity and the impact of *noos*, the human intellect). The semiosphere [...] is the most fertile ground for the semiosis. It is here that cultural-artistic 'explosions', discoveries, and 'leaps' to new original meanings are most likely to take place. (Talvet 2003: 154)

It is within this fertile space that "the *homo sapiens* dwells deeply in the *homo somnians* (man of dreams). Dreams (fiction, myths) overlap with the real, but still transcend the real we know to open new horizons" (ib. 141). The basis for the configuration of many myths is the desire for this liberating transcendence. Nonetheless, there are some 'anti-

¹ Y. M. Lotman introduced the concept *semiosphere* to describe "the whole semiotic space of the culture in question [...] The semiosphere is the result and the condition for the development of culture [...] We justify our term by analogy with the biosphere [...] namely the totality and the organic whole of living matter and also the condition for the continuation of life". The semiosphere is "the semiotic space necessary for the existence and functioning of languages, not the sum total of different languages; in a sense the semiosphere has a prior existence and is in constant interaction with languages" (Lotman 2001: 125, 123).

semiospheric' myths which contribute to paralysing the exploration of new horizons. This is one of the main characteristics of a myth created through literature in eighteenth-century Britain: the Augustan myth of stability.²

Augustan is a term given to the years between 1697 (the ministry of Somers) and 1742 (the end of Walpole's ministry). It is obviously connected with classical Rome: after Augustus' return to Rome from Spain and Gaul in July 13 B.C., "the programme of the *princeps* was exerting its effect on all the Roman world; and the prevailing spirit of unrest was held in check by 'visible and invisible bonds', promoting a peace which was to last for two centuries" (Benario 1960: 341). Poets and other men of letters celebrated this return to the Golden Age. The *ara pacis* was built on the Campus Martius to honour the emperor on his return to Rome after having peacefully settled foreign affairs. It symbolized the state restored to order. Since then, the label *Augustan* has been used to characterise an ancient ideal destined to be perpetually updated due to its attractiveness: "to think about a new Augustan Age is to ask how far the new ruler values learning and the arts, and how far his reign promises to bring civil conflict to an end" (Erskine-Hill 1983: 234). The timeless Augustan ideal comprised a belief in the potential of culture – more specifically literature – to create the conditions which would make a better society possible. As Johnson has noted, "Augustanism was [...] prevalent among the chief writers of the Queen Anne and Hanover periods who saw the first years of the eighteenth century as crucial in accelerating or preventing a decline in English culture" (1958: 521). Thus, the Augustan ideal acquired the status of a compensatory fantasy which enabled people to escape from a reality marked by unpleasant historical circumstances.

The utopian enterprise of the Augustans –based on the belief that the eighteenth century could be a new Golden Age– revolved around creating and transmitting an artificial image of the period as a locus of stability. Nevertheless, eighteenth-century Britain, which had evolved from a turbulent seventeenth century marked by civil wars and revolution, was experiencing at the time the transition from an old towards a new world to the frenetic rhythm of industrial machinery.

² I discussed some of the most relevant characteristics of this myth in Caballero Aceituno (2005).

Cultural critics such as G. Galt have described the period as a century of oscillations

between ideals of political emancipation, universal rights, the autonomous subject, and the reign of reason, on the one hand, and their dark familiars – statist or nationalist repression, the administered society, the disseminated subject, cynicism, and mass culture – on the other. [...] The Enlightenment awakens a compulsion to contradiction, to self-division. (Galt 1994: 532–33)

Violence, both verbal and physical, was pervasive: the libel and pamphlet industry reached its zenith during this period. Rings were frequently improvised in the streets and London became famous for its mutinies (such as those of *Wilkes*, in 1763, and *Gordon*, in 1780). Within this troubled context, the necessity for stability haunted the imagination of eighteenth-century ideologists, and the Augustan writers were no exception. However, in order to validate their myth of a stable society, some of them adhered to an artistic ethos which enforced restrictions on the unbounded creative potential of the writer. These restrictions, which they perhaps viewed as necessary strategies for survival within a hostile context, aseptically separated literature from what they believed to be an anti-heroic eighteenth century: an artificial myth of stability started to be configured. Its importance stemmed from the social prestige of the Augustans, inheritors of the culture of patronage and surrounded by influential politicians and nobles. The Augustans monopolised the most select *coteries*, which became aseptic environments where they immunised themselves against several contemporary ‘epidemics’, such as the explosion of popular culture, the rising materialism of an incipient consumer society, and the violent street riots, palliatives of an eighteenth-century society seething with discontent.

Confronted with these new destabilizing realities, many Augustan writers betrayed in their works serious doubts about the possibility of progress. Thus, the impulse towards literary innovation, towards the uncontrollable semiospheric exploration of new creative horizons, was disavowed. This pessimism about progress was deeply rooted in the more general pessimism about human nature. Many Augustan humanists, influenced by the Christian doctrine of sin and redemption, were convinced that human nature was irremediably flawed and

corrupt. In their view, human being's alienation from God had resulted in a tendency towards self-assertion which ought to be controlled (Greene 1967: 42). The Augustans' disbelief in progress also institutionalised an attitude of veneration of the past. The admiration for the past, together with a disregard for contemporary reality, too unstable to be associated with a Golden Age, became one of the most important tenets of the Augustan myth of stability.

The deprecation of self-assertion and the separation from 'undomesticated' reality resulted in the configuration of an ethos of restraint. As Fussell has argued, Augustan humanists took "[...] an almost sensual pleasure in the image of moral virtue, especially the image of self-restraint triumphing over temptation" (1967: 8). This ethos of restraint had its basis on the sacredness of human limitations, a philosophy which was also transferred to the realm of literary creativity: by delimiting acceptable and unacceptable areas for literaturisation, the Augustan critics created a stable but impoverished artistic microcosm ruled by closure. Military images, suggesting that the literary rules were necessary weapons against the disorder represented by disturbing otherness, recur throughout Augustan rhetoric. An aesthetics based on closure would prevent the contamination of this sublimated artistic microcosm with the many imperfections of eighteenth-century reality. Thus, the image of a stable eighteenth century was built upon the basis of an anti-semiospheric process of asepsis which confined to the cultural periphery – when not ignored – all those elements which could endanger the Augustan mythical construction of the period. In spite of the attempts made by some counter-Augustan writers and critics at subverting this cultural myth,³ its power transcended the temporal scope of the eighteenth century and embraced the twentieth-century critical scenario. It could be argued that the Augustan myth of stability was destined to be perpetually nurtured because it obeyed to a timeless human necessity: the necessity for peace and stability in troubled historical periods.

I intend to present here just an example of how the Augustan myth was viewed in the twentieth century, where its presence gave way to a dialectic which revolved around two opposed critical processes: on the one hand, the perpetuation of the anti-semiospheric techniques of

³ For an account of the Augustan/Counter-Augustan dialectics see Caballero Aceituno (2006a).

asepsis and invisibilization of 'problematic otherness' (typical of the Augustans) and, on the other, the rejection of stabilization in favour of hospitality, productive 'contamination' with reality and problematization. I shall exemplify this dialectic by discussing two critical studies radically separated both in time and in ideology. The first is George Saintsbury's *The Peace of the Augustans: A Survey of English Literature as a Place of Rest and Refreshment* (1916), whose title is very significant. For a very long time, Saintsbury – author of the ambitious *History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe from the Earliest Texts to the Present Day* (1900–05) – has been considered the most influential literary historian and critic of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The second critical study under discussion here is Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown's *The New Eighteenth Century: Theory, Politics, English Literature* (1987). Nussbaum and Brown take as the basis for their critical account of the eighteenth century some icons of instability traditionally invisibilized or confined to the cultural periphery. The titles of the essays contained in their volume do not speak about peace, rest or refreshment in the eighteenth century: they focus instead on discussing fictions of anomaly, race and gender issues, the global eighteenth century, sexuality, slavery or the feminization of ideology.

In order to illustrate the main tenets of the two opposed critical processes that Saintsbury and Nussbaum and Brown represent (invisibilization and problematization), I shall concentrate upon a very simple aspect: the semantics employed in their respective critical studies. There are some recurrent terms which clearly betray the authors' ideological position concerning the reception of the Augustan myth of stability. The adjective 'new', incorporated in the very title of Nussbaum and Brown's study, betrays an archaeological effort to recover something which, according to these critics, had been deliberately ignored: *the other* eighteenth century, silenced by some critical practices which had traditionally 'mutilated' its complex nature. That the authors are not happy with this traditional invisibilisation is already proclaimed in the introduction: theirs will be, in sum, an "interventionist reading" (Nussbaum, Brown 1987: 1) which intends to subvert the cultural centrality of some impoverishing accounts of the period and of the literary sensibility that it engendered. The volume is aimed at "broadening our perspective on the period" (ib. 3). In the

authors' view, artificial stabilisation cannot be considered intellectually refreshing, as it narrows our knowledge of the eighteenth century.

The authors purport to highlight the "value and significance of a study of the oppositional and the problematic-textual, cultural and political" (ib.) in the eighteenth century. Problematization, the most significant critical process in this study, stems from the realization that those stabilizing macrotheories which were formerly considered a source of intellectual rest and refreshment are built upon dangerously 'partial views':

The partial view [. . .] is the one that can see only the pleasures and the positions of power, and that dismisses the problematic, the popular, the female, the political or the self-consciously theoretical to an irrelevant periphery. (Ib.)

The 'problematic' (one of the most recurrent terms in Nussbaum and Brown's study) comprises every socio-cultural, political or literary element excluded from the 'stabilizing accounts' of the eighteenth century because the acknowledgment of its presence could contribute to subverting artificial myths of stability. The problematic operates in two ways: either unconsciously contradicting the premises upon which the myth of stability is based or consciously opposing or subverting them. Hospitality to these previously excluded elements defines the interventionist poetics of Nussbaum and Brown's volume:

Collectively, we open up texts and issues that have been infrequently discussed: [...] working-class women's poetry, scandal chronicles [...] as well as race and slavery, the under class, transvestism and the penitentiary [...] These concerns – largely invisible to the previous generation – present themselves with a *fresh*⁴ urgency to the new generation of eighteenth-century critics. (Ib. 17)

The activism of their interventionist politics is semantically epitomised by the phrase 'fresh urgency', where 'fresh' connotes openness and receptiveness towards those cultural elements excluded from traditional anthologies. Nussbaum and Brown's *freshness* is clearly different from

⁴ My italics.

Saintsbury's *refreshment*, a synonym for the intellectual confinement to the analysis of unproblematic cultural 'centers'. Nussbaum and Brown explicitly de-authorise the assumption that the eighteenth century was a stable period:

Contemporary eighteenth-century studies received its definition from major critics of the middle third of the twentieth century [...] [who] [...] viewed the eighteenth century as the tranquil haven of political stability in modern English story. And even after the twentieth-century revisions of that interpretation, the prominence of political analysis in modern historiography has continued to support the stereotype of pervasive and long-term stability in the period, a political stability linked to an image of equivalent social and cultural coherence, to a sense of an unchallenged class hierarchy represented and perpetuated in a literary culture where aesthetics, ethics, and politics perfectly mesh. Thus, the eighteenth century has fostered a criticism whose ultimate concern is the preservation and elucidation of canonical masterpieces of cultural stability. (Ib. 5)

Augustan writers built their myth of stability upon the basis of an aseptic separation from complex reality, a separation which subsequent criticism would perpetuate: consequently, many twentieth-century anthologies have presented an aseptically 'sublimated' version of the complex eighteenth century.

Augustan asepsis rested upon several processes, two of which are the targets of Nussbaum and Brown's attacks. The first process could be described as the sterilization of the writer's subjectivity, which, according to the Augustan critics, should be silenced or accommodated to the more general principles contained in their ethos of restraint. Subjectivity came to be associated with deviation and, obviously, deviations (identified with uncontrollability) were enemies of stability. By contrast, Nussbaum and Brown compile several articles devoted to activating these deviant voices by focussing, for example, on the "scandalous memoirists"⁵ and "the fundamental ideological contradic-

⁵ See F. Nussbaum's "Heteroclitics: The Gender of Character in the Scandalous Memoirs", pp. 144-167.

tions of the age”⁶ (ib. 16). The second process consisted in the sterilization of the function of literary criticism: the analysis of literature—which most Augustans viewed as an abstract, sublimated and, in sum, scholastic system—should not be mixed with the study of any ‘external’ socio-political or ideological matters. Nussbaum and Brown oppose these sterilizations by asserting that the essays in their volume “[...] share a commitment to critical and political self-consciousness [...] for the purpose of acknowledging the writers’ own cultural and historical positions” (ib. 4). They deal with transgression of gender boundaries,⁷ the *other*, noncanonical written works,⁸ complicated problems of class and race,⁹ the history of the oppressed, and suppressed voices.¹⁰

Due to the brilliant reputation of his author as a critic, *The Peace of the Augustans* (1916) has been traditionally considered an authoritative text. This authoritative character inevitably suggests centrality in the critical panorama. Moreover, it seems that Saintsbury himself consciously aspired to enjoy this central position. Updating the Augustan conception of literary criticism as ‘guidance’, he characterised his study as a “little guide-book” (Saintsbury 1916: 152). The prominence of some recurrent terms demonstrates that his task of guidance works, on the one hand, by making his addressees receptive towards the ideas of those whom he consider “judges of distinction” (ib. 116) and, on the other, by dismissing those of “very amateur critics”, “rather prone to set [themselves] against accepted judgments in order to show their own originality” (ib. 129).¹¹ In Saintsbury’s view, “judges of distinction” are those who present the eighteenth century as a stable *paradise* (one of his most recurrent descriptors for the period). Whereas Nussbaum and Brown locate intellectual refreshment in problematization, in Saints-

⁶ See J. Barret and H. Guest’s “On the Use of Contradiction: Economics and Morality in the Eighteenth-Century Long Poem”, pp. 121–143.

⁷ See J. Campbell’s “‘When Men Women Turn’: Gender Reversals in Fielding’s Plays”, pp. 63–83.

⁸ See F. Bogels’ “Johnson and the Role of Authority”, pp. 189–209.

⁹ See L. Brown’s “The Romance of the Empire: *Oroonoko* and the Trade in Slaves”, pp. 40–61, and J. Richetti’s “Representing an Under Class: Servants and Proletarians in Fielding and Smollett”, pp. 85–98.

¹⁰ See D. Landry’s “The Resignation of Mary Collier: Some Problems in Feminist Literary History”, pp. 99–119.

¹¹ Nussbaum and Brown, by contrast, considered their study “a project” which did not intend “to authorize a single reading of the period” (1987: 4, 14).

bury's study, *refreshment* (wittingly preceded in the title of the book by the word *rest*) locates intellectual comfort in the unwillingness to explore a disturbingly plural eighteenth century. To compensate his readers for this anti-semiospheric restriction Saintsbury promises enjoyment, an enjoyment derived from the exclusive concentration on the analysis of those "pleasurable readings" which avoid problematic issues (ib. 152).

The Augustans believed that stability depended on the existence of a 'dominant culture', the paradigm of both moral and artistic excellence,¹² which should 'reign' over the cultural landscape of the eighteenth century. Their 'semantics of sovereignty' is still a conspicuous presence in Saintsbury's study. He introduces the writer William Cowper in the following terms:

He had been born when Pope was undisputed monarch of English poetry: and when he first retired from the world, though Pope had been dead for some years, nobody had appeared as his successor. (Ib. 335)

The prominence of Saintsbury's semantics of sovereignty is counter-balanced by the existence of a diffuse, derogatory array of terms used to describe the 'periphery' inhabited by 'minor novelists', a locus which "the Augustan sun" does not illuminate. Some of these terms are

¹² The Augustans considered themselves part of a brilliant elite who would never surrender to the 'mercenary' writing practices of Grub Street. Sir Joshua Reynolds, founder of the Royal Academy, tried to keep the notion of cultural excellence away from the incursions of popular culture and anti-classicist creativity. Samuel Johnson managed to monopolise the prestigious journal *The Rambler*, which was issued twice weekly in London between 1750 and 1752: Johnson's intention in this project was that of a moralist aware of his duty to make the world better, making it conform to Augustan principles. The Augustan literary ideals also found an appealing vehicle for expression in the verbal wit of Alexander Pope, described by his contemporary Joseph Warton as "[...] superior to all mankind" (1974: iii). The Augustan authorities deified the 'imperial' John Dryden, a prestigious literary authority credited with having introduced the "myth of English poetic invincibility". They also imitated John Dryden's method of literary imperialism, which "approximate[d] the complicated dealings of an imperial power with its vassal states, ranging from brute conquest to the more subtle strategies of denigration and replacement of the invaded culture" (Kramer 1993: 55, 56).

contained, for example, in the fragment where Saintsbury describes that unstable period “[...] of rather less than twenty years, which intervenes between the appearance of Cowper, Crabbe, Blake, and Burns, and the end of the century” (ib. 330), a period which, in his view, beheld “the setting of the Augustan sun” (ib. 329):

On the whole it is, though full of interest, a distinctly second – or third – rate time, and what is more, its greatest interest is essentially alien from, if not actually rebellious to, the temper of the main body of the century – rebellious in a fashion particularly opposed to one at least of the terms of our title. A time of refreshment it still is; all times of literature are times of refreshment. [...] But a time of rest it certainly is not: rather of fermentation, of effervescence, of much flowing of ginger-beer, of the bursting of flawed and feeble ginger-beer bottles. [...] (ib. 330)

The perpetuation of the Augustan myth not only rests upon this semantics of sovereignty but also, upon a semantics of stabilization which illustrates Saintsbury’s de-authorisation of certain literary practices, such as innovation. Innovation, the unbounded exploration of new creative horizons, is described as ‘eccentricity’: Saintsbury considers that the writers’ eccentric “departures from the centre” (ib. 151), as he sees them, result in “a great loss of [...] rest and refreshment” (ib. 153). When discussing the novels by Laurence Sterne,¹³ Saintsbury concludes that he “[...] relies far too much upon eccentricity [...]”: consequently, he must necessarily be “[...] little read” (ib. 139). In this example, Saintsbury is perpetuating the dictums of one of the most celebrated Augustan authorities, Samuel Johnson, who after reading Sterne’s novel *Tristram Shandy* (1759–1763) assured his readers that “nothing odd will do long. *Tristram Shandy* will not last” (Boswell 1980: 696). Thus, significant innovative literary practices are subtly invisibilised in Saintsbury’s *Peace of the Augustans*.

Like the Augustan’s, Saintsbury’s model of literary excellence is built upon the basis of a separation from potentially destabilising

¹³ Sterne has been considered a writer anticipating narrative techniques labelled ‘postmodern’ in the twentieth century. See in this respect Pierce and de Voogd (1996) and Caballero Aceituno (2006b).

cultural elements. The term 'sterilizing', which he uses when evaluating *Chrysal* (1785), by Charles Johnstone, epitomises his aseptic literary ethos:

It can perhaps only be saved by the acceptance of a very doubtful plea of Carlyle's, for the most objectionable of his heroes, that a certain acidity or acridity in the treatment of 'inconvenient' things has a purifying or at least sterilising effect. (Ib. 156)

Unlike Nussbaum and Brown, Saintsbury considers the analysis of the writer's subjectivity "an irrelevant attraction" (ib. 150): he believes that, when included within the novel, "the author's own thoughts, sentiments and opinions" become "impertinent sermonisings-intrusions" (ib. 126). The refusal to problematize textual analysis by discussing the writers' ideological or political commitment is clearly envisaged in the fragment below, where John Shebbeare's *Lydia* (1755) is discussed:

Philanthropists, and those faddist of another type who are never happy unless they can trace in literary works some connection with matters historical, political, social *et omne quod exit in* - 'al', have sometimes had a good word for Shebbeare's *Lydia*, because one of its personages, Canassatego, a virtuous Indian, is a sort of link in the queer chain or chains, most oddly assorted otherwise, in which Aphra Behn, Rousseau, Bernardin Chateaubriand, Wilberforce, Clarkson, and Mrs. Beecher Stowe figure as celebrants of the merits of the noble savage and injured person of colour. To some who are proof against this irrelevant attraction it seems a very dull book. (Ib. 150)

The problematization inherent in the analysis of the writer's subjectivity is substituted by an unproblematic moral Manichaeism. Following what, in his view, is the motto of good criticism – "Prove all things; hold fast to that which is good" (ib. 127) – Saintsbury describes "the immoral Odyssey of Moll Flanders" (ib. 109), presents Tobias Smollett as a "great offender" and Samuel Richardson and Joseph Fielding as masters of "inconvenient situations" (ib. 115). About Laurence Sterne he writes that "he was inviting enough to any one who does not allow himself to be frightened off, either by [his] moral taint or

by his inartistic tricks" (ib. 140). Saintsbury's emphasis on morality activates the old Augustan semantics based on the opposition purity/impurity:¹⁴ Samuel Richardson is described "[...] as really a sinner" and Joseph Fielding "as the cleanest of all" (ib. 156). In sum, Saintsbury perpetuates the Augustan myth of stability by de-authorising the writers' semiospheric dialogue with reality beyond the parameters authorised by an ethos of restraint: he believes, for example, that George Crabbe struck "a new note [...] fatal to the Augustan peace" because he wrote "the annals of the poor" and dealt with "the seamy side of ordinary life" (ib. 344).

By comparing *The Peace of the Augustans* and *The New Eighteenth Century*, we get a basic idea of how the reception of great cultural myths works: although neutrality may be present in the dynamics of their reception, they normally excite passionate critical reactions, aimed at either preservation or destabilisation. These reactions mimic the passionate nature of the myth itself, always engendered in response to deeply felt emotional or intellectual necessities which matter-of-fact reality cannot satisfy. Invisibilisation is not intellectually refreshing, but under certain historical circumstances problematization may not be desirable and creating myths of stability can be deemed necessary. Behind the processes of stabilization and problematization we find human beings guided by different motivations in different historical periods. It is interesting to move from the places of rest and refreshment to the territories of the oppositional, trying to understand the circumstances leading to the creation of a myth and to its subsequent demythologisation so as to get a vivid semiospheric picture of how a given culture functions and evolves.

¹⁴ Augustan critics frequently resorted to the semantic field of impurity to describe the creations of 'deviant' counter-Augustan writers. William Spalding, for instance, considered that the incursions into uncontrolled fancy and romance promoted by novels had brought about an unfortunate change: literature seemed to be "[...] leaving the aisles of an august cathedral, to descend into the galleries of an [...] ill-ventilated mine" (quoted by Howes 1958: 166).

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‘Frau Freud’ and ‘Childe Rolandine’: The Postmodern Subversion of Grand Narratives in British Women’s Poetry

SABINE COELSCH-FOISNER

While women’s poetry of the mid-twentieth century saw a prevalence of writers embracing the Ethos of Interiority (Frances Cornford, Frances Bellerby) and the Ethos of the Numinous (Dorothy Wellesley, Ruth Pitter, Kathleen Raine, Anne Ridler, Elizabeth Jennings and Joy Scovell), with a few poets showing traits of the Ethos of Anonymity (Sheila Wingfield), the Fantastic proved a powerful Ethos for women poets, some working within the Apocalyptic Mode (Edith Sitwell, Lilian Bowes Lyon, Kathleen Nott), some in the tradition of Menippean satire (Phoebe Hesketh and Stevie Smith).¹ In their own time, the work of these latter poets proved particularly intractable to period maps and typologies of twentieth-century poetry, leading critics, anthologists and editors to define their carnivalesque, entropic, and metamorphic voices as hysterical or mad. However, these voices paved the way for subsequent generations of poets. Intimately connected with fantastic subversion, grotesque exaggeration, parody and caricature (Coelsch-Foisner 2002b: 856),² and described by Bakhtin as “one of the main carriers and channels for the carnival sense of the world in literature” (Bakhtin 1984a: 113), the Menippean Mode developed into an important current in women’s poetry of the second half of the twentieth century.

¹ For a structural typology of modern poetry into types of ethos, modes and voices, see Coelsch-Foisner 2002a: 101–44; and Coelsch-Foisner 2005: 57–79.

² For a discussion of the Menippean Mode see Coelsch-Foisner 2002b: 856–61.

Both Smith's "carnavalesque voice" and Hesketh's "displaced voice" reveal a vital concern with the grand narratives of Western Culture. My paper will explore what happened to these narratives – myths and stories, concepts, beliefs and traditions – in British women's poetry of the second half of the twentieth century. For this purpose I shall first concentrate on Stevie Smith's and Phoebe Hesketh's poetry and demonstrate the ways in which they deconstruct and displace, dismantle and transform Western traditions and concepts. Rather than dealing with any particular myth, I shall focus on techniques of carnivalesque subversion, metamorphic play, displacement and masquerade, which lie at the heart of their poetry and, in this respect, link the mid-century generation of women poets to voices coming to maturity after 1960: Jenny Joseph, Deborah Randall and Carol Ann Duffy. What they all share is a double, even polyphonous, discourse both drawing on and deconstructing the grand narratives and myths of Western culture. I shall argue that techniques of subversion do not only reflect aesthetic trends but open up fresh perspectives on the material treated.

Stevie Smith is best characterised as a carnivalesque voice. Subversive and eccentric, solitary, morbid and comic at once, she has attracted and puzzled generations of critics, who defined her poetic voice in disparate ways: by placing her in the tradition of British light verse, by labelling her a perfect outsider in the mid-twentieth-century poetry scene – an outsider who, admittedly, was more successful than most of her peers –, or by relegating her to the status of the mad woman in the attic, i.e. Palmer's Green in her case. Every attempt to bring her poetic voice within the confines of such established categories is likely to fail. Stevie Smith was first and foremost controversial and contradictory – both as a person and as a poet,³ constantly transgressing received modes of thought, ethics, rules of behaviour and communication, constantly breaking taboos and overstepping boundaries. Her poetry is marked by a constant effort of coming to terms with identity – with a self that assumes multiple shapes, guises, and roles. The "I" is infinitely protean and elastic in her poetry and – precisely because of its huge metamorphic potential – also on the verge of obliteration. The central

³ For a detailed reading of Smith's poetry see my chapter "The Carnavalesque Voice in Stevie Smith's Poetry", especially the part "A Poet Between Worlds" (Coelsch-Foisner 2002b: 866–70).

impact of Smith's subversive poetics is not the creation of an alternative form of life; it is – in accordance with the Bakhtinian concept of Menippea – a testing of truths, a philosophical and emotional tightrope walk between radical anarchy and an assertion of the culture whence it takes its origin. Hers is a particularly bizarre imagination, verging on the surreal and hysterical – as if she were perpetually on the edge of a nervous breakdown, as Elizabeth Jennings once described the impression of her poetic voice.⁴ Her very choice of titles, often having no relation to the ensuing poem, emphasises the carnivalisation of life characteristic of her work: its disruption of linearity, causality, logic, and sexed identity. Smith constantly plays with familiar concepts, stories, fables and figures in history and mythology without ever fulfilling the reader's expectations, as "Alfred the Great" shows, where she adopts her typically *faux-naïf* tone (see Ricks 1981: 147–57) to express the oddity of life and the ludicrousness of people's behaviour:

Honour and magnify this man of men
Who keeps a wife and seven children on 2 £10
Paid weekly in an envelope
And yet he never has abandoned hope.⁵

The greatness of one of Britain's glorious Kings has come down to the meek attitude of a miserable worker who struggles to make a living prior to the blessings of the British welfare state instituted after WWII with governmental support for large families.

According to Stevie Smith, there is a great deal to be deconstructed in Western civilisation, its myths and history: the Church, God, the ruling classes as well as the underprivileged, love, marriage and maternity, work and law, all forms of social organisation, moral behaviour, instinctual life and life itself, the very idea of identity, of values and norms. Nothing escapes Smith's piercing look and irony, which encompasses both mild derision and biting cynicism. Stevie Smith

⁴ See Fiona MacCarthy, "Cautionary tale of a caution", review of Spalding's biography of Stevie Smith, in *The Times* (5 Nov. 1988) (Poetry Library, subsequently abbreviated to PL).

⁵ James MacGibbon, ed., *Stevie Smith: The Collected Poems*, 1985: 19. Subsequently abbreviated to CP.

constantly breaks taboos, speaking out the most blasphemous ideas: God is an eater, a greedy devourer:

When I am dead I hope that he will eat
Everything I have been and have not been
And crunch and feed it and grow fat
Eating my life all up as it is his. ("God the Eater", *CP*, 339)

The contradictions and bitter ironies in Stevie Smith's work are characteristic of a conflict between an ineluctable involvement in dominant culture, ruling social laws, and paternal authority, on the one hand, and an effort to unseat such authority, on the other. This dialectic relates her work both to Bakhtin's notion of the medieval culture of humour, which was universal and "directed at the same object as medieval seriousness" (Bakhtin 1984b: 88) and to what Elaine Showalter has described as a "double-voiced discourse" in women's writing, which "embodies the social, literary and cultural heritages of both the muted and the dominant." (Showalter 1981: 179–205)⁶ The muted and the underprivileged hold a particular place in Stevie Smith's poetry. When relationships are at issue, women tend to be the victims, men the malefactors. A critic of Smith's once pointed out that her imaginative world is populated by "sick minds and unhappy animals".⁷ To these we must add a species of wretched women. Smith's creatures are continually caught in deplorable conditions: deserted by lovers, despised by their fellowmen, abandoned by God and hated by nature, which is "sick at man" ("Alone in the Woods", *CP*, 32). Life for Smith means being in "enemy territory", as she once explained (Dick 1971: 45).

Far from complying with the Christian virtues of fraternity and love, both men and women prove incapable of marriage, love, and friendship. They are either unfaithful, exploitative, and ruthlessly selfish – human faces with a monkey soul that utters 'social lies' ("The Face", *CP*, 175) – or on the contrary, incurably subservient, humble, and masochistic to the point of self-destruction. Apart from being governed by unequal power

⁶ See also Civello's suggestion that "Smith's fiction accommodates both the psychological possibility of personal agency and the realistic acknowledgment of cultural limitations on women's lives." (Civello 1997: 84)

⁷ John Press, "Fire and Fantasy", a review of Smith's *Selected Poems*. Reference missing. The review is in the file for Stevie Smith in the Poetry Library, London.

relations, Smith's social universe is populated by deceitful, murderous, and insane individuals. People often seem perfectly adapted to social life, whilst beyond the surface there lurks the maniac or criminal. It is a cynical world, false and corrupt, where the individual in vain craves for love, desperately shouting "Love Me!" to unloving rocks (*CP*, 191) and perpetually torn between obedience and rebellion, duty and desire.

Significantly, Smith addresses master narratives and myths in order to throw up those contradictions and expose men's, and especially women's, precarious situation. Eve is one such narrative. The poem "How Cruel is the Story of Eve" (*CP*, 481–83) is a typically Smithian rambling poem, with the voice challenging our simple acceptance of the myth. Blaming the story of Eve for having subjugated women to male dominance, the voice equally suggests that men are not fit as rulers either. Her stanza- and line divisions, her variable lines with striking, often atrocious, rhymes ("responsibility" – "history"), the expository tone ("Yet there is this to be said still") alternating with exclamations and questions are expressive of a meandering mind. The voice comments on the story of Eve, pities the human race, accuses social hierarchies and cries out in pain: "Ah what cruelty / In history / What misery." This three-line stanza is repeated together with the opening quatrain, providing both the emotional tenor and a tentative structure for her thoughts:

How cruel is the story of Eve
What responsibility
It has in history
For cruelty. (*CP*, 481)

What follows is a short anatomy of sex-relations, with women bearing the brunt of the Fall and made inferior to men whilst the latter cunningly mask their 'wisdom'; men are the winners but unfit to play their role, and both sexes are forced to continue by a 'natural' love none of them had desired:

Yet there is this to be said still:
Life would be over long ago
If men and women had not loved each other
Naturally, naturally,
Forgetting their mythology
They would have died of it else

Long ago, long ago,
 And all would be emptiness now
 And silence. (CP, 483)

No conclusion follows from this except for a trite observation that animals do not suffer the human lot: "This is the meaning of a legend that colours / All human thought; it is not found among animals." (CP, 483)

In her *Collected Poems*, the poem is accompanied by two doodles, the first showing a woman with raised hands triumphantly or madly jumping, the second showing the reverse: a crying woman with a girdle and sword round her waist, subverting the message of her subjugation while confirming her miserable role. Poem and doodle conspire in a subtle mechanism of turning the world topsy turvy and disrupting expectations. Such shifts of perspective are typical of the overall role-play upon which Smith embarks in her poetry, radically pleading for plurality and holding laughter and scorn as her weapons against cruel rulers, myths and cultural institutions. Smith's laughter makes her an unrivalled spokeswoman of the margins, dialogically engaging with Western culture, its philosophical and legal foundations as well as its language. In a truly Bakhtinian vein, her laughter "means the defeat of power, of earthly kings, of the earthly upper classes, of all that oppresses and restricts" (Bakhtin 1984b: 92).

Sceptical of affiliations, Smith, in her own centrifugal⁸ way, reformulated the romantic belief in originality and innovation, in inspiration and the individual talent which, in her case, is fundamentally at odds with both society and humanity. Hence the categories and affinities in terms of which she has been described – as the true voice of suburbia and English oddness,⁹ as a writer of light verse in the tradition

⁸ Bakhtin sees all utterance as composed of both centripetal and centrifugal forces. The centrifugal force in language dismantles linguistic unity and authority, "it fights enslavement and incorporation" and emphasises "social and cultural heteroglossia", whereas the centripetal force aims towards a "single proto-language", imposing itself as a "unitary language", a "language of authority". See Jefferson 1990: 137–38; and Frederic Jameson's discussion of "The Dialectic of Utopia and Ideology" in Tallack 1995: 319–29.

⁹ See Fiona MacCarthy's suggestion that "One has to have been brought up on *Rebecca* and *Matilda*" and the mordant moral verses of the real English childhood to comprehend completely the background of a poet who was both a caution and a Cautionary Tale." "Cautionary tale of a caution", *The Times* (5

of Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear, William Allingham and Hilaire Belloc, of epigrammatic verse in the manner of Robert Graves, or as a voice in the tradition of the "Celtic and lunatic fringe"¹⁰ – prove inadequate, because she resists pigeon-holing and transmutes everything "into something engagingly *sui generis*"¹¹ as critics have suggested. Smith's imagination both grows out of her background and outgrows it in the sense that all dialogical relations transgress what they refer to. John Bayley has perspicaciously suggested that the effect of such poetry is "to liberate us briefly but completely from social behaviour",¹² and Kathleen Nott has given us an excellent metaphor for Smith's carnivalesque imagination when applying to it T. S. Eliot's dictum that every single poet alters the whole body of the tradition:

...and I had a vision of the Body turning over on its back, tickled, if ever so lightly, by Miss Smith, and relaxing into a faint grin. There is simply nowhere to put her. But she puts you in mind again and again of something to which you must on no account compare her.¹³

For carnivalesque play draws our attention both to these liberating moments and to the social structures and strictures from which it frees the players.

One key to Smith's poetry is the cunning blend of cliché and originality, both as regards the scenes and situations she depicts and the forms she employs. Subscribing neither to conventional forms nor to formlessness, Smith draws on a variety of poetic conventions, techniques and devices which she disrupts and displaces to suit her carnivalesque vantage point: dramatic monologue and character sketch, story-poem, ballad, hymn, epitaph, apostrophe and invocation. Either deliberately disruptive of metrical and rhythmic laws or exaggerating

Nov. 1988) (PL). In her interview with Peter Orr, dated 6 Dec. 1961, Stevie Smith herself suggests that many poems "are memories from childhood and Grimm's stories and the German fairy stories" (Orr 1966: 226).

¹⁰ Kathleen Nott, "Tickling the Muse", a review of *SP* (PL).

¹¹ Hugh Gordon Porteus, "Sibyl", a review of *Selected Poems* in *The Spectator* 209 (19 Oct 1962): 610 (PL).

¹² John Bayley, "Obscure Crucifixions", a review of *CP*, *The Listener* (25 Sept. 1975) (PL).

¹³ Nott, "Tickling the Muse" (PL).

them to the point of metronomic accuracy ("I love the dead, I cry, I love / Each happy happy one")¹⁴ as well as insisting on rhymes (both melodious or forced and twisted) and on line divisions and stanzas as structural signifiers, Smith in more than one respect comes up to Roman Jakobson's definition of "poetry as organized violence committed on everyday language".¹⁵ After reading Book X of *Paradise Lost*, the narrator-voice imagines a dialogue between Eve and the Virgin Mary, and since there is no easy solution to their differing opinions "... they talked until nightfall, / But the difference between them was radical" ("A Dream of Comparison", *CP*, 314). Light verse, however grave its implications, is a model example of the voice's resistance to what Bakhtin calls the centripetal forces in culture. The poet's voice both relies on and deconstructs dominant discourses – whether emotional, argumentative, or expository. Thus "Unser Vater" (*CP*, 39) is a prayer for weakness, and "On the Death of a German Philosopher" takes the form of a riddle instead of a eulogy or epitaph:

He wrote *The I and the It*
 He wrote *The It and the Me*
 He died at Marienbad
 And now we are all at sea. (*CP*, 16)

Smith's poetry always touches upon what is familiar or dear to us. Cultural, mythological, and literary references abound in her poems – notably to Wordsworth ("Intimation of Immortality", to Grimm's fairytales ("Es war einmal") and Greek myths ("Persephone"), to Archbishop Cranmer ("Admire Cranmer!"), "Breughel", Proust and Racine ("Phèdre"). "To a Dead Vole" – "Now Vole art dead / And done is all thy bleeding" (*CP*, 122) – reads like a Blakean epitaph; the phrase "... and the clouds return after the rain" subverts the image of the shower in Keats's "Ode to Melancholy"; the lover's all but eloquent lament over the bier of "Arabella" parodies the tradition of Victorian death-bed scenes; "The Murderer" responds to Browning's "My Last Duchess", "Childe Rolandine" to Browning's "Childe Roland" (see also Sternlicht 1990: 45–46; 69), and both her invocation to the Person

¹⁴ "Edmonton, thy cemetery ..." (*CP*, 404). See also Calvin Bedient's comments on Smith's rhythm (Bedient 1974: 142–44).

¹⁵ For a discussion of Roman Jakobson's poetics in the light of Bakhtin's dialectic see Jefferson 1990: 138.

from Porlock to stop her rambling mind, as it interrupted Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" (*CP*, 385–86), and the "Suicide's Epitaph" parody the tradition of posthumous tributes to the beloved: "Oh Lord have mercy on my soul / As I had none upon my body." (*CP*, 155).

Stevie Smith's allusions to canonised literature are indicative both of her eclectic taste and her centrifugal relation to Western culture, and so are her "frequently startling and seemingly extempore mixtures of elements" (Bedient 1974: 141),¹⁶ of poems and apparently disconnected doodles, of languages (English, French, and German) in her macaronic poems (e.g. "Suicide's Epitaph" or "Monsieur Pussy-Cat, blackmailer") – switching between languages is another kind of 'escape', she explained in an interview¹⁷ – of King Jamesian archaisms and the colloquial idiom, of myth and modern sensibility as in "I had a dream ...":

I had a dream I was Helen of Troy
In looks, age and circumstance,
But otherwise I was myself. (st. 1, *CP*, 421)

Even though such dialogical excursions into play and fantasy are all too easily "relegated to a kind of wigwam outside official literature", as both Grigson¹⁸ and Pumphrey have suggested ("to pass Smith off as respectable [...] must inevitably be self-defeating")¹⁹ and, as Smith herself knew, her voice would not have ensured her such popularity at poetry readings in the 1960s and made subsequent critics consider her "among the best of modern British poets" (Ricks 1981: 147), if it was

¹⁶ See also Horovitz's suggestion that "Stevie demonstrated that pretty well anything can [...] be incorporated in verse, including equivocal components of rhythm, tone, pitch, and subject matter in the same poem: archaic and slangy, fanciful and acidly naturalistic, lyric and narrative, colloquial and aureate, cadenced and unbound." Michael Horovitz, "Of Absent Friends", *New Departures* nos. 7/8, 10/11 (1975: 12–19); repr. in *Sternlicht* 1991: 147–65; here 151.

¹⁷ See her interview with Williams, where she explains why she likes reading Agatha Christie in French. It is a kind of escape, because the effect is a "most exotic flavor". (Williams 1974: 105–27).

¹⁸ Geoffrey, Grigson, "Sad, glad, and serious", review of *CP* in *The Guardian* (7 Aug. 1975) (PL).

¹⁹ Martin Pumphrey, "Play, Fantasy and Strange Laughter: Stevie Smith's Uncomfortable Poetry", *The Critical Quarterly* 28, 3 (Autumn 1986), 85. Also repr. in *Sternlicht* 1991: 97–113.

nothing but 'light', 'eccentric', and whimsical. Hers is an eccentricity that reaches to the deepest strata of modern experience – in a manner particularly influential on later generations of women poets.

Phoebe Hesketh is the second voice in the mid-century poetry scene fundamentally indebted to the Menippean Mode. Her poetry is marked by an unorthodox approach to nature and man, always prepared to raise uncomfortable questions about human nature and the self as it eludes, or struggles to get hold in, the world – sometimes ghostly, sometimes trapped by darkness and winter, commonly putting on guises and avoiding or mocking social life regulated by law, customs and functional knowledge. Her poem "Myth" celebrates a woman's fantastic metamorphosis from a white mouse into a Parnassian horse, effected solely by virtue of her longing. "Myth" is typical of a craving for release from conformity and norms, whether these pertain to domestic life or to an orderly garden-paradise. In accordance with this longing, her voice identifies with realms, landscapes, phenomena and characters that contradict all that inhibits, controls and diminishes the self: dreams, illusions, fantasies, death and darkness, clowns, corpses, wild horses, and zebras, whilst criticising those that enforce or succumb to social conventions and cultural constraints: academics, scientists, the men of the 'head'.²⁰ Hesketh's poems exhibit a marvellously dissenting temperament, which pervades both her excursions into imaginary worlds (especially the poems put together in a section entitled "Legend, Myth and Story" from her collection *No Time for Cowards*, 1952)²¹ and those poems which are narrative, reflective, discursive, or ironical in tone. Dissent and tension are the two prevailing attitudes of her poetry.

Her poems speak to us with an attitude of deep involvement, which resides in the many dislocations and subversions that characterise her images, concepts and vocal perspectives. These characterise her explorations of myth and metaphor, which are at once more self-conscious and overtly satirical than her earlier poems in the pastoral tradition collected in *No Time for Cowards* and *Out of the Dark*.

Of all that has been said about Hesketh, one designation, in particular, applies to her voice – that of an "outdoor poet", not only because of her passion for outdoor sports and leisure activities (Palmer 1956:

²⁰ See Hesketh's poem "Breath of All the World": "This is the war of Head against the Heart ...". *Out of the Dark* (1954: 23). Subsequently abbreviated to *D*.

²¹ Subsequently abbreviated to *C*.

153), but because her poetry is primarily spatial and visual and abounds in dislocations and exclusions, continually employing a conceptual schema of inside and outside, and signalling a sense of living outside the centre or of being shut out. As Neill Powell observed: there is a sustained "sense of ill-fitting" in her poetry.²² Often Hesketh gives us surfaces underneath which there loom dark and chaotic forces, a destructive or positively metamorphic potential, entropic impulses or spiteful dreams, ambiguities and fearful existences, through which the poet calls into doubt the seeming balance of our lives. It is this conflict in her poetry between the socially ordered world and those menacing and liberating forces beyond the surface of things that connects her work with Smith's subversion of the grand narratives in the Menippean Mode.

"A Satyr's Lament" from *No Time for Cowards* represents Hesketh's most directly Menippean rendering of an existence split between daily routine and invigorating illusions. Half-man, half-goat, the satyr is a homeless, hybrid creature that lives between worlds, and his mad ride across a fantasy land located halfway between the sky and the earth represents a temporary release from his earthbound soul.

My earthbound soul had grown a cloven hoof
That thrusts its imprint everywhere I tread;
And though by day I slave beneath a roof,
At night a goat-foot madness twists my head
Till the moon is in my eyes and whistling reeds
Shrill through my sleeping senses – up the hills
I leap, a streaking satyr, all the ills
Of housebound custom scorned, and all the needs
Of boundless nature loosed in silver flight.
Dryfoot across a sun-forgotten marsh
I fly with limbs of shadow winged with light;
And breath comes gently though the wind is harsh. (C, 50)

All antitheses from which men suffer are crystallised in the satyr's complaint: stasis versus movement, the rigid laws of human society versus nature's boundless capacity for change, unspoken inner needs versus mask-like outer appearances, and the temporariness of all escapes. Simultaneously conforming to and rejecting the order imposed

²² Neill Powell, "Explaining the Daisy", *P.N. Review* 1989 (PL).

on him, the satyr may be seen as the central myth on which Hesketh's poetry rests and to which she returns whenever she feels submerged by 'housebound custom'. For the satyr's contradictory nature is intimately related to the poet's own plight and his voice is intimately connected with lived experience: "... as if something is speaking through you", she explained.²³ The mirror effect of the rhyme scheme in the first stanza (ababceddcefef) strengthens the satyr's divided adherence to conscious and unconscious, and the reason for his vagabondage: he and the world of men mutually reject each other. The poem is both a lament and the enactment of a wild dream ("and now I ride ..."). It records a metamorphosis ("Transfixed ...", both st. 2) and visualises a flight towards "untrodden places".

The satyr is not only a mythological figure himself, but prepares for Hesketh's imaginative flights out of Western culture. It is emblematic of the mythopoetic method she was to evolve in her later poetry, drawing on Western mythology and the Christian tradition in order to rewrite them in feminist terms. As for Stevie Smith, Eve provides both a constraining story and a powerful subtext for subverting its meanings. In two poems, which perfectly exploit the ironies variously highlighted in the women's poetry of the post-sixties, Hesketh is concerned with the Fall – not as a theme or metaphor, but as a *story* which forms part of the Western consciousness. To show that the story is flawed and that our understanding and uses of the myth rest on false assumptions is the effort in both "The Serpent" an early poem included in *No Time for Cowards* and reprinted with alterations in *Netting the Sun* (1989),²⁴ and "Scapegoat", a later poem, which is also included in the latter volume.

Both poems have an overtly gendered focus and, by retelling the myth from a feminine standpoint, expressly take sides with Eve. In "The Serpent", Eve is conceived of as a woman who yields to her ravisher and both fears and enjoys the act. The seduction in Hesketh's "Serpent" is described in an ambiguous blend of violence and pleasure: "She languished on the penetrating spine; / Tasting wine, drank poison in the feast." ("The Serpent", *NS*, 36). This double register of fulfilment and fall, conveyed in the image of the thorn, an attribute of fallen nature

²³ See her interview for "Write Now" (Radio Merseyside), where she explains the process of writing poetry. In my own interview she also emphasised the sense of poetry being "dictated to you" (4 May 1994).

²⁴ Subsequently abbreviated to *NS*.

in Milton's *Paradise Lost*²⁵ permeates the whole poem and recurs throughout Hesketh's work. Eve, whose name is never mentioned in "The Serpent" is a paragon of the fallen woman, recalling Philomela as she is transformed into a bird and locked in a cage after having been raped by Tereus: "Her fluttering soul, a heap of feathers, stirred / In a closer cage than one of metal bars" (C, 43). The poem is pervaded by the ambiguity of surrender and restraint. The tempter "sowed insatiate longing in her heart"; she seeks "cool leaves" to quench her appetite, but is offered the "ripe, full-blooded fruit / Of rich barbaric red", and when she eventually yields, mounting in an orgasmic flight "a spiral stair" (a familiar Yeatsian image), which seems to be an ecstatic liberation from earthly fetters, the strictures of moral law close in on her. The surrender to socially unacceptable and, therefore, pernicious love recalls the morally ambivalent status of female sexuality in Victorian literature: since the woman is constrained by rigorous mores, the rape almost licences Eve's sexual enjoyment and provides an imaginative valve for socially controlled and repressed desire.

Interestingly, the closing tercet of Hesketh's "The Serpent", which directly relates the Fall to hell, is omitted from her later version of the poem. Here Hesketh dispenses with the overt moral implications of the myth in favour of unresolved psychological questions. The shift is from myth to existential conflict.

Then coil by coil, mounting a spiral stair,
 Ascended ecstasy towards the stars
 Till flogged desire sank voiceless on the floor.
 Her fluttering soul, a heap of feathers, stirred
 In a closer cage than one of metal bars;
 And a gate clanged in her brain for evermore. [Here the
 new version ends.]

The crawling creature slithered from her cell;
 And she, alone in darkness, heard her name
 Ring out and crack the drinking cups of hell. (C, 43)

²⁵ In Milton's *Paradise Lost* the rose is thornless (Book IV, l. 256). See Milton in Elledge 1993: 92.

There is not the slightest hint of Providence in Hesketh's account of the myth, no sign of Milton's "Fortunate Fall",²⁶ which compensates for Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden. Besides, if we recall the immediate effect of "that false fruit" displayed in Milton's Book IX – "Carnal desire inflaming" (l. 1013, p. 224) – Hesketh's Eve falls in a world which, by Milton's standards, is already fallen. How else is she capable of such burning desire? When Hesketh's Eve succumbs, she is already corrupt, i.e. vulnerable to such desire as in *Paradise Lost* is one of the results of the Fall. Hesketh's speaking voice establishes a dialogical relation to the epic by slipping into Eve's mind and offering a convincing psychological explanation for tasting the fruit. Her Eve does not merely succumb to an illusion, she enjoys *real* pleasure. The fruit does not *only seem* more delicious than anything tasted before, it *is* more delicious. (cf. Milton: "... such delight till then, as seemed / In fruit she never tasted, whether true / Or fancied so, ..." [Book IX, ll. 787–9; 219]).

In Hesketh's later poem "Scapegoat", an ironic fable more in line with the anecdotal streak and conversational tone of postmodern feminist poetry, Adam enters the scene as a cowardly sycophant who undoes Eve "with his lost innocence" and then puts the blame on her:

The ancients – all males, of course –
wrote the story in reverse.
The Tale of the Rib,
woven from pride and guilt,
is irrelevant.
It all began with Eve
lying alone in the grass
enjoying the apple
he hadn't the wit to discover.
Politely she handed it
to him who bit it greedily
undoing her
with his lost innocence.

²⁶ Arthur O. Lovejoy called the Fall "The Paradox of the Fortunate Fall", quoted in Elledge's annotated edition of *Paradise Lost* (1993: 471).

Adam, the betrayer,
hearing his name
pouring down in accusation,
put up his umbrella
covering himself,
leaving Eve in the rain. ("Scapegoat", *NS*, 213)

Hesketh's narrative voice retells the story. The act of eating the apple is not an infringement of divine law, but a discovery; Eve is not depraved, but a clever explorer who kindly shares the fruit with Adam. When God calls the latter to account, he promptly leaves her in the lurch. What constitutes the Fall in this poem is an act of male disloyalty. Despite its overtly feminist statement, characteristic of Hesketh's later phase of mythopoetic revisioning, "Scapegoat" shares with "The Serpent" the sensuous joy associated with the forbidden fruit and the irredeemability of an act which is never explicitly identified as 'sin'. In either poem, the woman is brought low by the man: by male cunning in one case, and by male cowardice in the other. The effect is a subversion of the authority of the myth. For the Fall is nothing but a misunderstanding, an injustice or a codified lie.

Entering the voice of the woman, especially of those victimised in the great myths of the Western imagination, became a powerful technique in the emerging feminist poetry of the 1960s. In her first volume *The Unlooked-for Season* (1960)²⁷ Jenny Joseph dedicates her voice to great female figures in Western mythology, speaking on their behalf and reconstructing their feelings and thoughts: Persephone laments her fate ("Persephone returns", *SP*, 18–19) and Eurydice remembers Orpheus turning back and condemning her to the "worst". Joseph's voice characteristically captures the cadences of everyday speech, transforming her mythic heroines into common, thinking and feeling women:

So we started walking along the passage
Leaving the great hall. Slowly at first because
I was not used to action. It seemed to grow lighter
And with the smell of the sun above on earth
My steps grew surer. O hurry, hurry, thought I,

²⁷ All quotations are from Jenny Joseph, *Selected Poems* (1992). Subsequently abbreviated to *SP*.

Lest the dark shadows stir upon their thrones
 Relenting that I went so easily.
 This time, surely, not as in the dreams
 I felt the air – and this time it was true.
 Then as even the memory of that place
 Was struck out by the sudden joy of a bird
 You had to turn. O fool, O fool my love.
 The memory of your look I keep with me
 Forever beyond sight. The worst is now
 I cannot tell you this. (“Eurydice to Orpheus”, *SP*, 11)

Rewriting myths in common speech and giving a voice to the silenced victims both in the form of dramatic monologues or little dialogues, Joseph reveals profound psychological insight. The voice’s immediate involvement is characteristic of women’s rewriting of myths. In “A version of the phoenix story”, the speaker is asked by the bird to give it shelter and, in return, promised magic stories and journeys. But the “I” is betrayed, the bird starts pecking the hand, which lets it fly.

As with a scream it plummeted
 ‘You have betrayed me,’ the bird said.
 ‘Yes, but you made me,’ I answered. (*SP*, 53)

As women poets revisit the stories of female heroines, bring them to life or transform their fates, they also shed new light on the male relations that determine their fate – Satan, Adam, Orpheus. Deborah Randall’s 1993 volume *White Eyes, Dark Ages*²⁸ marks a unique effort to recreate the Victorian critic and thinker John Ruskin through the eyes of his women: his young wife Effie, who abandoned him for the painter Sir John Everett Millais, Rose La Touche, and his cousin Joan Severn. Abounding in erotic images, Ruskin’s women give voice to their frustrations, jealousy and desire in unmistakably modern(ist) tones and recall erotic adventures in symbolic nature images:

And girl, I’m glad we’ve kissed,
 Glad it was out of doors
 Where the flowers have vulvas
 And bees crawl in. (“The Kiss”, *WEDA*, 52)

²⁸ Subsequently abbreviated to *WEDA*.

By adopting multiple voices and contrasting or complementing the female perspectives by Ruskin's, Randall translates pre-Raphaelite sensuality into a modern diction charged with erotic images and the vocabulary of physical love. The picture emerging from Randall's poems includes quintessential elements of Victorian aesthetics: necrophilia, flower symbolism, as well as the cult of the dead woman, as in "Need":

My need for her became necrophilia.

I truly wanted her dead
But could only induce sleep.

Even from sleep she cried out like a woman
Wanting a lover. (*WEDA*, 52)

A more recent cycle of poems in this mythopoetic vein is Carol Ann Duffy's *The World's Wife* (1999),²⁹ in which the wives – imaginary or real – of great men are given a voice, depicting their lot, revealing their weaknesses or appropriating for themselves the male role. Duffy, whose work took its origin in the Liverpool Underground Poetry in the 1970s, is one of the most frequently discussed women poets of the last decades, not least because of her open social criticism and the trends of "New England", which her poetry embodies and which almost earned her the Poet Laureateship in 1999. In her poetry, Duffy established herself as the voice of those commonly silenced in society and in poetry: prostitutes, immigrants and criminals, those living on the margins of society, whom she presents in a terse, often broken language. Her immigrants speak with authentic accents and often strike a vulgar note as they tell their stories, relate everyday incidents or play imaginary roles, as the wives of the great men do: Queen Herod, Mrs Midas, Mrs Tiresias, Mrs Aesop, Mrs Darwin, Mrs Faust, Anne Hathaway, Queen Kong, Mrs Quasimodo, Medusa, Frau Freud and the Devil's Wife, to name some of them. Transposing her imagined or imaginary wives into everyday-life situations, they often address their husband's outstanding achievements in a casual manner, such as Mrs

²⁹ Subsequently abbreviated to *WW*.

Midas who serves up a meal and pours him a glass of wine only to realise that things turn gold as he touches them:

He asked where was the wine. I poured with a shaking
hand,
A fragrant, bone-dry white from Italy, then watched
As he picked up the glass, goblet, golden chalice, drank.
(*WW*, 11)

Mrs Darwin ironically looks upon her husband from the perspective of evolutionary theory as they stroll through the zoo:

Went to the Zoo.
I said to Him –
Something about the Chimpanzee over there reminds me
of you. (*WW*, 20)

The scathing irony of the poem lies in the date prefixed to the poem: 7 April 1852, i.e. 6 years before the publication of Darwin's ground-breaking work *The Origin of Species*. The implication is that evolutionary theory, like other great achievements in Western history, springs from a trite observation made by a woman, who received no merits for prompting her husband's work. "Pygmalion's Bride" tells us how she feigns the lifeless statue and eventually responds to his caresses, but when she screams with lust, Pygmalion disappears: "And haven't seen him since. / Simple as that." (*WW*, 52); Salome, by contrast, proves a callous murderess, confessing:

I'd done it before
(and doubtless I'll do it again,
sooner or later)
woke up with a head on the pillow beside me – whose? –
What did it matter? (*WW*, 56)

Eurydice gains a voice too, and so does Pope Joan, who contrasts her high office with the experience of birth; Frau Freud addresses the 'ladies' in a pseudo-lecture about penis-envy that abounds in phallic synonyms, and Mrs Aesop is bored by her husband's moralising fables: "By Christ, he could bore for Purgatory. He was small, / didn't prepossess. So he tried to impress." (*WW*, 19)

Carol Ann Duffy's, Jenny Joseph's, and Deborah Randall's subversive role play provides a pertinent example of feminist mythopoetic rewriting. By subverting myths, stories and legends, by reinventing the biographies of great men and reconstructing gender relations, women poets of the second half of the twentieth century have enlarged a pervasive streak in women's writing and explored its potential with new inventiveness. In the twentieth century this streak was prepared for by the Menippean voices of the mid-century: Stevie Smith and Phoebe Hesketh; on the wider horizon, this vein harkens back to a long tradition of women's writing encompassing virtually all genres: from eighteenth century women's satire via female gothic to postmodern women's short fiction. Late-twentieth century women's poetry provides an interesting corpus within this debate, showing not only women's contribution to postmodern literature, but making obvious the importance of the 'double-discourse' inherent in their work – writing from within and against cultural traditions – for postmodern debates about culture and the self.

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Man Alone?: Changing Fate of the Myth of Masculinity, Individualism and Nationalism in New Zealand Literature

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The New Zealand writers best known outside the country are women – Katherine Mansfield, Dame Ngaio Marsh, Janet Frame and Keri Hulme. However, when one opens a survey of New Zealand literature, one discovers a tradition that is male, associated with the masculine self-image of the nation that sees its cultural heroes in the All Blacks rugby team and celebrates the rugged discipline derived from the sometimes bleak but often breathtaking local landscape. In fact, New Zealand as a settler nation has sought to camouflage its frequently felt national inferiority complex under “blokish” simplicity, opposed to and elevated above the “effete” European/British refinement. This self-image has been derived from the local terrain and male bodies. In this context, to use the words of Donald Hall (1994: 8), the male body “appears as a metaphor for social, national and religious bodies” and, as a site of struggle, it allows us to gain a better insight into cultural (self-)mythology. The fathers of New Zealand literary tradition (e.g., Allen Curnow or Frank Sargeson) also stressed the nationalism and masculinism of the attempts to hew out a local realist diction instead of the disparagingly feminised romantic tradition borrowed from Britain. According to these writers, if New Zealand was to create a national voice, it was to be a voice that was derived from the New Zealand landscape and spoke in the rugged masculinist idiom of the soil.

This celebration of the nation and local landscape through predominantly masculine imagery can be seen in other settler societies, first and foremost the USA, where the quest took place in the 19th

century, in the work of James Fenimore Cooper, Mark Twain or Walt Whitman. New Zealand faced identity work during the dissolution of the British Empire and the conceptualisation of national literary voice starts only after WWI, in the cultural turmoil of the near-simultaneous escalation of the centripetal forces of modernism and class struggle. Nationhood, masculinity, class and literature are tightly interwoven in this identity creation, and local uniqueness is constructed by negotiating international influences. No man is an island and neither is a literature. Thus, in order to discuss the emergence of the "authentic" local voice in New Zealand fiction, references need to be made to the imperial tradition of adventure stories as well as to American literature since they help to bring the notions of alienation and male subjectivity explicitly to the literary-political landscape of New Zealand to explain why the solitary male figure comes to define national literature, modernity and the nation itself.

Benedict Anderson (1991: 5) has famously called nations imagined communities and thus nationalism can be interpreted as one of the great myths of the post-enlightenment era. Defining it as a myth does not suggest that it is not real but rather identifies it, especially in the 20th century, as a core master narrative of most (Western) cultures that has shaped their imaginaries, including their literature. The myth of nationalism grows out of the past and ideals of the community that imagined it and hence has a unique face in different locales, intersecting with other myths and traditions. Among the most potent of the latter, even if they remain covert, are ideas of gender.

Gender appears to be recognised as a particularly salient social dimension in New Zealand. Indeed, New Zealand has been described as a culture in which "the structures of masculinity and femininity are central to the formation of society as a whole" (James and Saville-Smith 1989: 6–7). Gender, it has been suggested by some scholars (e.g., Holmes and Stubbe 2003: 573), is as intense a preoccupation in New Zealand society as class is in Britain. It seems therefore reasonable to suggest that it would also be a central feature in the emergence of national literature.

The discourse of colonisation tends to represent the colonised areas as female and the conquering nation as male, transposing traditional gender roles that see the male as aggressive and the female as passive onto the narratives of imperial conquest (MacDonald 1994). However, colonised countries have been gendered differently, as pointed out by

Connell (2005: 75) who traces the existence of subtle hierarchies of masculinity among the subjugated peoples. Thus, although America, too, entered the European consciousness as a colony, its image has been predominantly masculine both inside and outside the country (see e.g., Pöldsaa 2007).

This preference can be explained by the nature of American colonial experience that required the claiming of large territories of and “taming” them for Western civilisation. Connell (2005: 74) has stated that such a process of conquest helped produce a frontier masculinity that fostered “an unusual level of violence and egocentric individualism”, encouraged by the at best tenuous control of the disciplining institutions of Western civilisation. Connell (ib.) also notes that “frontier masculinities might be reproduced as a local cultural tradition long after the frontier had passed”. Thus, the masculine tradition derived from the frontier was also central to the development of an American voice in literature. We can see a notional line that leads from Whitman to Hemingway to, possibly, Cormac McCarthy or Chuck Palahniuk, of male fiction, populated by unruly lonely men, at odds with the universe but determinedly continuing their individualist quest, however existentially hollow, in a way echoing a core master narrative of the American nation.

There are considerable similarities in the masculinities that developed in countries with a colonial experience similar to that of the US, above all Australia and New Zealand. The affinity between Americans and New Zealanders was noted already in 1903 by an American historian cited by Sinclair (1959: 295–296):

They [New Zealanders] are the Yankees of the South Pacific. In fact, New Zealand is a little America, a sort of condensed United States. If all the nations of the world were classed according to the number and importance of their points of resemblance, the United States, New Zealand and Australia would stand in a group together.

However, the three nations also have significant differences. For example, Phillips (1987) has argued that in the late 19th century New Zealand had an official state policy that encouraged the emergence of an orderly settler masculinity, based on responsibility and community, rather than the individualism of the American West. This view is also supported by a different pattern of migration to the New World: while

the US was open to all comers and Australia's white inhabitants often started out as convicts, New Zealand was a product of "scientific colonization" by respectable families, granting it a more "British identity than to other colonies" (Sinclair 1959: 297). This influenced national ideologies and values, for example a lasting tension between individualist and communitarian principles (Hansen 1968: 58). This is why we should not make quick judgments about similarities in two literary traditions on the basis of surface observations but, rather, should place texts within national ideologies and literary cultures.

For settler societies in general authentic local identity has been associated with the act of colonisation. Phillips (1987: 3) has called the ideal that emerges from this process as "a powerful legend of pioneering manhood /.../ a model of courage and physical toughness", one he suggests was constructed from early on by opposition to the feminised home country (ib. 4). This opposition was relevant for the imperial centre as well, for starting from the mid-19th century Britain experienced notable "man trouble", a fear of the emasculation of the imperial male, an embodiment of the empire. Since the decline of the British man was seen as a sign of the waning of imperial power, measures were taken to re-masculinise Britain. Manliness was to be restored by resorting to moral and physical strength and, following Social Darwinist tenets, (controlled) regenerative violence (Rutherford 1987: 14). This led, for example, to the rise of collegiate sports, the Boy Scout movement and the adventure novel which were all to cure the ills of modern civilisation by developing more assertive masculinities.

This re-making of masculinities is also a literary project. In this context romance was defined as an inherently masculine genre. Indeed, as Dixon (1995: 4) demonstrates, many influential writers and critics of the era saw it as a means of "deflecting attention away from the dangerous unpleasantness of realism, which fostered introspection, unmanliness and morbidity". In this juxtaposition realism becomes equated with decadence and feminised, while romance is seen as a reincarnation of the epic and thus masculinised. As a result of this tendency, as Elaine Showalter (1991: 79–81) has also observed, the "masculine romance" allowed men to escape the rigidity of Victorian society and morality, seeking their inner selves through the primitive.

This gendering of literary genres was reversed in colonial/postcolonial contexts, as argued by Susan Sheridan (1985: 53, cited in Dixon 1995: 7) who points out that (imperial) adventure stories and

romance came to be opposed to literary nationalism, written in a realist idiom, and the genres, in a process of Othering, were also feminised. Such an association of literary nationalism with realist diction can be found internationally, especially when a new nation attempts to assert its voice after the cultural domination of a powerful culture. If empire spoke in the language of the romance where the colony played the role of the subjugated object, the postcolonial situation meant its rejection and opposition with realism/naturalism where the newly independent colony could assume the role of the speaking and acting subject. This sentiment can certainly be traced in New Zealand, where, in the 1930s the late-colonial Edwardian diction was replaced by a more rough and critical realist stance.

This shift led to a re-calibration of the cultural compass. The examples to be emulated could no longer be from Britain but, rather, from other cultures sharing a postcolonial destiny similar to New Zealand, above all the United States. Already in the 1930s critics noted that New Zealand writers could find necessary models for creating a language appropriate for representing "the anarchy of life in a new place" (Jones 1991: 161) in the work of Mark Twain, Ernest Hemingway, Sherwood Anderson and William Faulkner. As Jones (*ib.* 163) cogently argues, "the appeal of the American authors was that they were dealing with a 'colonial' experience in a 'colonial' language" and provided an example of a successful mixing of European roots with local inflections.

This stands in stark contrast with a rather humble description of New Zealand in the 19th century (e.g., in Reeves 1898: 174–175) when the subjugation to the centre is explicit. The search for an "authentic" literary voice was parallel to the search for an authentic national being, perceived as a masculine self, one that could stand alone, asserting its independent subjecthood. In many ways, the creation of this national manhood paralleled the imperial manhood former colonial subjects sought to escape. In both cases, men seek to escape cultural constraints associated with femininity: in the imperial context, they are the constraints of an urbanised culture, in the postcolonial one those of imperial centre.

Crotty (2001: 6–7) has traced a very similar development in Australia where middle-class masculinity "was constructed against racial, gender, class and national 'others'" and where idealised masculinity emphasised morality, athleticism and a mateship culture that is

rooted in the colonial past when men had to depend on each other (Pease 2001: 191). We find a similar mateship culture in New Zealand, “male camaraderie of pioneers united by common physical struggle against the elements, in war or sport, all cemented in the pub” (Bannister 2005). Bannister (2005) observes that in the discourses of male homosociality of this mateship culture emphasise male independence from “‘feminising’ influences of domesticity, ‘polite’ society and imported mass culture”. These qualities are also prominent in the “man alone” tradition.

The “man alone” trope has developed into a recurrent image in New Zealand culture since the 1930s when New Zealand fiction can be said to have found itself. The tradition is rooted in John Mulgan’s novel *Man Alone*, originally published in 1939. It focuses on the experiences of Johnson, ex-soldier immigrant in the 1920s who sees New Zealand with a rather naturalist eye. Johnson works as a farmhand in the unforgiving North Island, tangentially getting involved in rioting and worker unrest. After accidentally killing his boss, he goes to the bush, surviving an epic struggle with wilderness. He eventually leaves New Zealand and ends the novel in the Spanish Civil War. Although it is a New Zealand novel, it is thus not insular. It echoes the themes that can be seen in global fiction of the period: alienation, left-wing impulses and an attempt to find a new and more authentic literary language. It is also a “man’s fiction” in its lack of women characters as well as its voice and themes.

John Mulgan’s biography has found almost as much analysis as his novel. Mulgan (1911–45) was born in Christchurch, the most English of New Zealand cities, where his father worked for the local paper. His mother was one of the first women graduates of Auckland University College. Mulgan excelled in academic life and sports. He initially studied English and Greek at Auckland University College but continued his education at Merton College, Oxford where he took a first-class degree in English. After graduation, he worked at Clarendon Press and later Oxford University Press. In 1939 he joined the army and was posted in the Middle East. He fought at Alamein, in Iraq and Greece. Despite having a stellar career, he, for reasons unknown, killed himself, ironically, on Anzac Day in 1945. In a way, he can easily be viewed as a “golden boy”, a handsome athlete, writer and soldier (Robinson and Wattie 1998: 385–386). Although later scholars have found darker shadows in the narrative, especially in connection with

gender and race, Mulgan continues to be important for New Zealand identity because of his introduction of a key theme that has dominated the literary tradition of the country.

In many ways, cultural independence was also negotiated within Mulgan's family. His father sought to celebrate New Zealand, albeit in a largely romanticised Edwardian mode borrowed from Britain. Although he recognized that in order to develop an independent literary tradition the author had to "seek his subjects in the life about him" and find "something more than facile sentiment against a background of tree-fern and tussock" (Jones 1991: 140), he himself was unable to realise this aim. That task fell to John Mulgan, who wrote one of the most archetypally New Zealand texts while away from the country, in the centre of the British Empire, focusing on a character who is not a New Zealander and leaves the country before the end of the story. James Belich (2001: 334) describes Mulgan's opinion on New Zealand's relationship with Britain as having "the texture of family relationships that can be full of internal bitterness but united against the outside world". Yet sons eventually leave home and this is the process Mulgan captures. He manages to take a critical but also loving look at the country, his vision made sharper by distance, asserting its cultural and national independence.

Mulgan's *Man Alone* took its title from a remark in Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not*: "a man alone ain't got no bloody fucking chance" (Hemingway 1987: 225). Today the novel is often interpreted as "a kind of celebration of the Kiwi bloke going it alone, getting offside with the law and women, and making a fist of it on his own terms" (Robinson and Wattie 1998: 386). Traditionally, the novel has been seen as a "hard look at the reality of 'ordinary' life, without the self-congratulatory assurances common to both British and New Zealand conservatives" (ib.). It is in this interpretation that the novel stands as a landmark of national fiction, a myth that helps to centre the masculinist mythology of New Zealand.

Mulgan belonged to a generation of New Zealand writers who thought they started New Zealand fiction proper. They defined what had been there before as weak or effete and attempted to write something that was robust and honest. The values, as Patrick Evans observes, are associated with the masculinism of the post-WWI era, idealised in the image of the poet soldier who was articulate but not effeminate, "Wilfred Owen rather than Rupert Brooke" (Evans 1990).

Mulgan fit the role perfectly, as can be seen from his biography. The doyen of the literary establishment, Allen Curnow, wrote in a masculinist idiom and critics praised the realism of authors like Hemingway, setting them as role models for a more taut and manly prose that would be appropriate to a nation that was finding its own voice. As Johnson (1991: 161) and Day (1968: 93) point out, Mulgan's novel is indebted to Hemingway not just for its general ethos but also for its simple and understated style, perhaps even for the literary point of view and plot structure. Indeed, Sinclair (1959: 301) observes that the mythologised misfit figure that appears in New Zealand fiction is a "close relative of the 'masterless man' whom D. H. Lawrence encountered in American fiction". Thus the assertion of national literary independence required infusions of fraternal support from another settler society.

Kai Jensen (1996: 72–78) has seen a link between national autonomy and masculinity through the trope of self-sufficiency, freedom from influence and capturing "the 'real' language and lives of working men – 'muscular', 'vigorous', 'realistic' or 'objective' writing". In this context, women's writing (e.g. the work of Mansfield) could be seen as being too intertextual (i.e. interspersed with traditions other than New Zealand one), subjective and prone to influence – and hence not truly "of the nation". What could be more "of the nation" than the land, the core element of the organic view of national identity? Thus the local (masculinist) New Zealand tradition came to fixate on the man in the landscape, often a masochistic image of man in a hostile landscape – the man alone. The poet James K. Baxter (1955: 70–72) later identified the tradition focussing on the experiences of isolated anti-establishment male anti-heroes as the leitmotif of Pakeha writing.

In this context, the cult status of Mulgan's novel should not come as a surprise. As Evans (1990) ironically notes, "all this conspired to make Mulgan an ideal figure almost before he wrote". He has been described as the martyr of his time, in harmony with the male romanticism of the Hemingway era. Evans (2005) has even argued that Mulgan is often seen as a sacrificial figure, someone "who has been killed on behalf of the culture", something that answers the settlers' urge to indigenization, satisfying "its inherent colonialism with images of heroic sacrifice". This reading is why Evans has raised the question whether we can count the novel as realist or whether we should read it as a romance, though one that centres on the gritty quest for independence and male

bonding. In a way, as suggested above, the masculine quest for independence leads the realist national fiction back to the genre frames of imperial adventure, because of a shared gender-genre dialectic and the need to assert selfhood by emphasising masculinity.

This opinion has been seconded by critics who show the extent to which the first generation of New Zealand writers have not produced "realistic" realism, but actually a new idealised convention, a way of writing about the nation and its experience that conspicuously omits women or the Maori and thus produces a partial narrative at best and a deceptive one at worst. The community that Johnson achieves after the end of his solitary wanderings is a male community, working together or sharing a trench in the Spanish Civil War, not one that embraces the whole society. This may also explain why it is only recently that literary scholars have rediscovered women authors who were also producing realist prose and even a sort of "woman alone" texts (e.g. Robin Hyde), only a realism that did not fit the mythologised self-image of the nation that the male literary establishment had created for itself and thus it remained underappreciated or even unnoticed. But the leitmotif is so strong in the cultural psyche that it has been picked up by those initially excluded and by now the man alone has been joined by a non-hegemonic man and woman, all alone, more diverse but still keeping the national trope in play, even if subversively (Jones 1991: 148).

Man Alone thus bears a heavy burden of representation and that may be why the main character is almost featureless, an everyman rather than an individualised human being: we never know his first name and his surname, Johnson, is more than generic. Day (1968: 97) goes as far as to argue that the author is not interested in an individual but the social process. While Day believes the process of one of class conflict, the present paper claims it is one of "nation building".

The view of masculinity that emerges in the novel involves an interesting take on individualism, one that has many parallels in the work of American writers such as Melville or London, especially the theme of the struggle of man against nature. In *Man Alone* too the protagonist is involved in a perpetual struggle – he is a WWI veteran, gets involved in street riots and ends the novel in the Spanish Civil War. The main struggle, though, is against land/nature but also New Zealand culture: "what was real was the battle they were both fighting with the land they worked. So long as they could live there and were

left alone, it was a battle they could carry on, even while the world sank outside them" (Mulgan 1990: 100). Bending the land to his will moulds the man's subjecthood and independence, as a parallel to the original settler experience, a metaphor that can, perhaps, also be extended to the literary terrain.

Stephen Harris (2000) has argued that "this view of individualism as promoting and instilling a potentially destructive idea of self" is a deeply rooted Western self-concept. He goes on to speculate that there might be a certain "New World syndrome" according to which people liberated from the traditional (enlightenment) vision of the self in the New World can endlessly construct versions of their selves appropriate to the altered circumstances. That is to say, individualism is more likely to be celebrated in the frontier environment where it becomes an effective means of opposing oneself to the imperial centre, an individual's declaration of absolute personal freedom acting as a parallel to the national declaration of independence from the mother country. It is no accident that the wilderness was used as a means of healing the wounded masculinity of the imperial centre as well, in the form of phenomena as diverse as adventure stories that offered tales of regenerative violence on the colonial frontier and the Boy Scout movement that promised to raise "real men" in the metropolitan centre.

Masculinities, as Phillips (1997: 18) has claimed, are "spatially constituted" and "reflect the characteristics of the spaces in which they are constructed". Frontier conditions have encouraged the construction of masculinist selves that re-configure the traditional male-female dichotomy in the colonial relationship between the centre and the margin. The relationship, however, should be seen as contextualised. The form of individualism has interesting features in the case of Mulgan's novel. Here, as Harris shows, the freedom to be one's individual self is inseparable from the freedom to move and act at will and whim: "If he could get away he could keep some things. He could keep the one thing he had had in all the years he had known the country, and that was the freedom to go and to work and to live where he liked" (Mulgan 1990: 127). It is interesting to note that the freedom and individualism that Mulgan espouses is very different from the frontier ideal as here the hero is anchored in the world of work, that is, he is free from but also participating in community. Johnson is a man struggling with the land rather than the wilderness; he is more of a farmer than a pioneer, although farming here is cleansed of elements of

pastoral utopia. Although Johnson is part of the New Zealand landscape, he is also part of the European cultural conquest, not a Natty Bumppo who seeks to adapt himself to the terrain, losing himself in it to carve out a new identity (for a cautionary latter-day American version of this theme see Krakauer 1996).

This is not to say Johnson does not appreciate nature and its splendours. In fact, as Day (1968: 108) notes, he is the only character in the book to respond to landscape. For example, in a scene Johnson's remark "It is a bloody marvellous country," he said. 'By God, Scotty, I wouldn't mind climbing that mountain there'" elicits no understanding from Johnson's co-worker (Mulgan 1990: 25). Nature is noted, not romanticised, though. As Day (1968: 114) astutely observes, the novel is consciously set on North Island that is less photogenic and more raw than the poeticised South Island and the choice renders the struggle of man and land more savage and more bleak.

Landscape, though, is primarily a frame, not a source of liberation or an antagonist to be defeated, like in American fiction. Nature achieves its true liberational potential when Johnson leaves land and goes to work at sea. This is marked by the protagonist losing his paleness and alienation, twin signs of civilisational malaise. Johnson is described as being "alive with the sun and the sleepiness of salt air and the long days at sea" (ib. 36) and we can feel the weight of the land lifted from the character but this is only a brief episode after which Johnson returns to land/civilisation. While many of the later greats of New Zealand fiction, above all James K. Baxter, tried to reclaim the past by tapping into the Maori world and making peace with it, Mulgan is clearly part of the Anglophone colonial experience of tilling the soil and sowing the seed, the tropes of masculinist realist fiction next to images of hunt and war. New Zealand is a wilderness, but it is described as a work in progress, a land waiting for colonisation: "the green, rich, unfinished look /.../ low hills, half-cleared /.../ farm houses wooden, unpainted" (ib.18). It can thus be argued that Johnson sees the country as a European, an outsider coming to claim and develop it. The novel presents a vision of New Zealand filtered through a European imagination, masculinist but also colonial and Eurocentric, one that reflects the twin pull of the new land and the metropolitan centre, that runs through whole New Zealand culture.

The individualism that emerges in *Man Alone* is also different from the American models. In the American context, individualism is fierce

and often leads the male protagonist into conflict with and exile/flight from community (be it escape into nature, or substance abuse). The theme is seemingly similar in the “man alone” tradition that not only gives us the solitary figure of the man in the landscape, misunderstood by women and society (frequently equated) but also imbued with the tradition of “going to the bush” to escape the tentacles of law. Seemingly, the novel stresses this point as the only free characters Johnson encounters are literally men alone, physically separated from society: an old sea captain and an old hermit. However, the theme is not at all as individualist as it seems on the surface and contains notes of ambivalence about the viability of total individualism. After all, Johnson does not relish his solitude, encountering his inner wolf during his trek in the bush, as if nature held up a mirror to him, revealing his inner being, and he finds the encounter unsettling:

There was sound all the time, of the river running, birds from early morning to the owls calling at night, but he felt within himself a great solitude, a feeling which had never troubled him before in the long periods of his life that he had spent alone. There was a heaviness of the bush that pressed upon him and weighed him down, until the sound of his own voice was startling to him (ib. 136).

Johnson is reconciled to the environment, if not himself, and he re-lives the original settler experience of being first repelled by nature and then gradually overcoming it. That victory, though, does not reduce his desire to escape into society/community.

Community plays a much more important part in the New Zealand “man alone” tradition than in American novels, reflecting the centrality of mateship rather than the celebration of the insular individual. Hemingway also yearns for male camaraderie, something that seems in his novels to be recaptured only in the worlds of war or violent sports, microcosms separated from society as a whole. In *Man Alone* mateship appears dispersed in different social activities, from the pub to the demonstration but also to the daily work in the field. This being anchored in a communal mode of thinking while maintaining an illusion of freedom might be one of the explanations for the fact, as Harris (2000) has observed, that Johnson treats freedom as a possession: he can keep his freedom but nowhere in the novel to we get that he actually is free. Thus, although we see Johnson alone most of

the novel, he does not achieve total freedom and, in the end, concludes that "most of the time a man spends too much time alone" (Mulgan 1990: 205). For him, escape into nature is not a key to liberation (he comes "to hate the heavy silence of the bush" (ib. 144)) and he is not morally cleansed after his survivalist ordeal and does not gain a lesson about self-sufficiency.

Rather, he emerges with resignation no different from the one with which he "took to the bush". At the end of the novel, we see him embracing a (male) community of soldiers and a cause to fight for, the Spanish Civil War. The finding of community also allows him to embrace the identity of a New Zealander (ib. 204), one he does not explicitly identify with on a New Zealand farm or in the bush. The New Zealand individualist cannot embrace a total freedom, perhaps weighed down by the 19th century ideal of New Zealand settlement, or perhaps the responsibility to offer a voice to the nation. If we view the "man alone" writing as the core of creating "authentic" New Zealand literary themes, it is inevitable that it cannot completely disavow community that he speaks. He might seem to be alone, but also involved in the mateship of New Zealand literary universe, a homosocial community that is created around a mythologised image of the nation. This image is tied to the land, but also its cultivation, to the insular nation, but also to the world around it. Achieving this delicate balance of independence and influence is something that signals the maturity of New Zealand culture.

Although research continues to show that "blokiess" is still a dominant feature of New Zealand culture, there are noticeable shifts, echoing both the destabilisation of the integrated self in the Western world and the idea of the nation in the era of globalisation. Tough masculinities that still persist in bars and rugby games may serve as a defence against anxiety about identity, but the latter has become inevitable in today's world of ideas and cultural/economic flows. The questioning of an ideal that is so closely tied to the core of national identity as masculinity in New Zealand has hitherto been a taboo: as James and Saville-Smith (1994: 64) observe, "to question masculinity is to be critical of our national ethos". In New Zealand there are still too many elements of a "cultural cringe" that is characteristic to settler societies and maintaining its staunch veneer of masculinity seems to act as a stabilising force, playing the same role as imperial adventure novel in late 19th-early 20th century Britain.

Yet, even if the nation has not yet acknowledged the need to deconstruct its identity and make room for alternative gender articulations, the “man alone” theme is no longer alone in recent New Zealand fiction. How well that translates to broader cultural realities, remains to be seen. Evans (2005) notes that there is a marked shift in attitudes towards cultural nationalists. He states that “masculinism re-contextualises our cultural nationalism not just in a colonial past of self-sufficient frontier blokes but in expressions of a larger crisis of the subject of modernity”. Feminist and queer interruptions, in his words, could be seen as having post-colonial significance in re-making the national identity, helping it emerge from its protective individualist-masculinist myth. Myths are healthy only until they keep communities together by offering ideals that are shared by a majority of the community. Now that New Zealand has re-assessed its view of itself, embracing the Maori, women and alternative masculinities, it is not too rash to call for a re-imagination of the myths without the fear of losing the core of national self. If a man’s selfhood is secure, he no longer needs to assert it aggressively and can embrace a wider community. The same applies to national identities and national literatures. In this New Zealand does not need guidance either from Britain or the United States.

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For Page or for Stage? The Myth of Shakespeare in Estonia

EVELIN BANHARD

The current article's title refers to the pair "page and stage" as the idea was theoretically proposed by Ortrun Zuber Skerriitt who has argued:

For drama does not only exist as a literary work of art expressed in written language and to be appreciated through reading, thinking and discussing; but drama lives in its theatre performance, the total experience expressed in oral and non-verbal language and appreciated by all physical senses as well as the intellect and emotions. (Zuber-Skerriitt 1984: 5)

However, the approach might just as well have been proposed as follows: from stage to page to stage. Most plays are by default written for stage performances, but for the playwrights that are usually categorized as the classics – their texts are very often analyzed without considering the aspect of how these texts function when performed on stage. Shakespeare has been one of those classics whose works have been scrutinized over centuries, very often focusing only on their purely literary qualities. In his book called *Shakespeare the Player*, John Southworth, himself an actor as well as a Shakespeare scholar, provides ample evidence that when writing his plays, Shakespeare had concrete stage and actor-orientated goals – while creating his characters, he had the members of his troupe in his mind's eye, building this or that stage persona as a tailor designs a suite for a specific client; when considering the scene locations he thought of the play house the troupe was currently giving performances in, etc. Not to mention the well-known

fact that at the time of his writing plays were not written to be printed and published for reading, they were not considered a literature of that much worth. Even more, the playwrights tried to prevent their works from publication so that rival acting companies could not use them for their own performances and get profit from it.

Considering all that, the primary objective of Shakespeare's plays as to be performed on stage, to be *seen and heard*, should not be doubted. However, as Southworth points out – Shakespeare's plays, once printed as books, caused “an explosion of scholarly interest and a still thriving academic industry – all centred, naturally enough, on the plays as literary texts” (Southworth 2002: 6). He goes on arguing that the analyses on Shakespeare's plays are more of a mirror reflecting “the researchers' own preconceptions and prejudices, and of the values and assumptions of the period in which they are writing[...]” (ib. 7). He claims that as long as they believe:

[...] that in writing his plays Shakespeare was primarily engaged in a form of self-expression, rather than in responding to the practical needs of the theatres he served and the changing demands and tastes of the public with whom he was in constant touch in the most intimate way possible – as an actor on the stage – they rest on a fallacious premise. (Ib.)

All this adds up to Shakespeare the classic having a kind of a mythical aura about him. The same idea has been put forward by Boris Tuch, an Estonian theatre critic, though he talks about the myth of Shakespeare in Estonia from the point of view of stage productions. In an article called “Shakespeare and his myth: deconstruction and compensation” he argues that “The works (as well as the identity) of Shakespeare are perceived largely *mythologically*. It is acceptable to consider the reception of *Shakespeare as a cultural myth* in Estonia (as well as anywhere else)[...]” (Tuch 2004: 120). However, Tuch does not touch the matter of the translations into Estonian. This is done, though rather briefly, by another Estonian Shakespeare scholar, Maris Peters, in the same collection of articles where Tuch's paper can be found – “Playing Games with Shakespeare”¹. Peters also focuses on some concrete stage

¹ The collection consists of the proceedings of the II International Shakespeare Conference, Gdansk, August 6th–8th, 2004

productions of Shakespeare's plays in Estonia, but all through her article she keeps coming back to the matter of the translations used in them. According to her, most reviews on productions that used translations by Georg Meri (from *The Collected Works of Shakespeare*, published in seven volumes from 1959–75, mention the shortcomings of these translations when *heard* on stage. On the other hand, Peters says that according to the reviews some of the more recent translations made on the commission of theatres, are too bold in their use of language, referring specifically to the ones made by Peeter Volkonski and Hannes Villemson, who work together as a team (Peters 2004: 149). Another thought-provoking idea by Peters in her article is:

Whereas the English-speaking world has spent much time and filled much bookshelf space discussing the controversies between page and stage, for Estonia, where no significant native textual criticism of Shakespeare exists, Shakespeare is mainly a dramatist. (Peters 2004: 136)

The peculiarity of this rightfully worded phenomenon stems from the fact that although Shakespeare may be first and foremost a dramatist for the Estonians, he is the dramatist whom we know from the pages of the "bookish" (Peters 2004: 138) translations by Meri – a version of Shakespeare that highlights more the reading drama qualities of the plays than their potential as lively stage material.

All discussed above leads to the central topic of the present article – the myth of Shakespeare in Estonia (here looked at only from the aspect of the plays' verbal qualities, though not simply on page, and not in the framework of all the factors that constitute a performance, i.e. the "other-than-verbal" side of a play). On the one hand there seems to be a perception that Shakespeare the classic is the texts as they are translated in *The Collected Works* – the numerous volumes of poetical, serious, complicated and sophisticated verse (and prose), surrounded by lengthy forewords and thorough commentaries and footnotes. These translations have the status of a canon of Shakespeare in Estonian (for example, when there are quotes from Shakespeare in other works of literature or criticism, the Estonian versions are almost always cited from Meri's translations). Yet, as it has been implied, the theatrical circles have always considered these translations as not applicable to actual usage on stage (See Rähesoo 1995: 194), although there have been

productions that have used these translations without (great) alterations. This constitutes the core of the myth which is actually only further strengthened by the fact that when a different approach has been taken in translating his plays, the "red light" is switched on, with the alert saying: do not take your liberties with the classic.

André Lefevere and Susan Bassnett have emphasised that: "[translation] is never innocent. There is always a context in which the translation takes place, always a history from which it emerges and into which a text is transposed." (quoted in Alvarez and Vidal 1996: 7). And among all translations, those of Shakespeare's texts seem to belong to a rather unique category – the idea of the influence of translations of Shakespeare on receiving cultures has been stressed more and more since translation studies started to emerge as an independent discipline and has been extended by many scholars of the field (e.g. Delabastita 1998: 222). Even so that the translations of Shakespeare's works and the reception of them can be regarded as a "sign" of status for a national culture, signalling maturity, modernity and "equality" with early modernizing cultures. As a result, the translations of his texts have "helped" to shape and form the cultural identity and literary as well as linguistic traditions of different nations.

Such patterns can be easily perceived when looking at when and how different translations of Shakespeare have been made in Estonia. The first ones, made in the second half of the 19th century were translated into Estonian via the German language and mostly directly for concrete stage productions². The German influence on Estonian culture was very strong at that time and most of the major cultural impulses came from there. In terms of translation theory this phase did not pay so much attention to the source text and culture as those of the target ones. Meaning the matter of the original, or the prototext, a text in English was not acknowledged and the source text for a translation being a German version of Shakespeare was not so much a serious problem but just a practical matter, probably deriving from the translators' better knowledge of German than English. However, an interest in introducing Shakespeare to Estonians cannot be questioned.

² Although there were also some "retellings" printed, for example *The Merchant of Venice*, published in 1856 under the title "Wenediko linna kaupmees. Üks jut tullulikuks aeawiteks Ma-rahwale", translated by F.H. Wilberg from the version of G. Nierits (and therefore also via German) (Annus 1995: 468).

The beginning of the 20th century is a period of a more stable establishing of Estonian own language and culture and along with that also the necessity to approach foreign texts directly from their original sources. The second decade of the 20th century saw the first translations of Shakespeare that were made directly from English and also published as such. (The very first one was *Hamlet*, translated by Aleksander Ferdinand Kaljuvald who published the translation under the pseudonym A. F. Tombach in 1910). It was a time of lively debate over the Estonian language and culture and a birth of literary and linguistic criticism and scholarly works on these issues. Noticeable is also the pronounced need for “our own Shakespeare” which, as mentioned earlier, is very often a signal of a nation’s self-awareness gathering strength – as it has been stated by Alexander Shurbanov and Boika Sokolova who have done research on translations of Shakespeare into Bulgarian – “No European nation, old or young, can ignore Shakespeare, if it strives for self-legitimization.” (Shurbanov and Boikolova 2004: 95)

During the Soviet time the first (and so far the only) edition of Shakespeare’s collected works translated into Estonian was published. As to the plays, the work was accomplished almost solely by one translator, Georg Meri, with the exception of a couple of plays translated by Estonian writers Jaan Kross and Rein Sepp, and the sonnets which were translated by an Estonian poetry translator Harald Rajamets. As mentioned above, the translations by Georg Meri, published in seven volumes as *The Collected Works of Shakespeare*, during the years 1959–1975, received the status of a canon of Shakespeare in Estonian and were for some time, if not still, considered to be *the* Shakespeare in Estonian.

An interest in new Shakespeare translations can be seen from the 1980s. These translations were made directly for theatres (which is an interesting parallel to the first national awakening period) and often by people from within the theatre spheres (a writer and stage director Mati Unt, an actress Anu Lamp). In the 1990s, also a team of two translators started working on Shakespeare’s plays. Again, these are people closely related to theatre – Peeter Volkonski and Hannes Villemson. By now they have translated six Shakespeare’s plays for theatres: *The Winter’s Tale*, *Twelfth Night*, *King Lear*, *As You Like It*, *Othello* and *Pericles*. So far none of their translations have been published.

As can be concluded from the brief outline presented, there is a certain pattern to the translation and reception of Shakespeare's works in Estonia that allows seeing the translations as telling something about the receiving culture and the ideological shifts in it. Borrowing once again from André Lefevere:

[...] translating aspects of one culture into another is never a simple semantic substitution. Rather, the self-images of two cultures come to bear on the matter and clash over it... Translations, therefore, can teach us much about certain aspects of a culture at certain stages of its evolution. (quoted in Alvarez and Vidal 1996: 6)

Summing up the central aspects of drama translation introduced so far, we have the following ones to apply to the case of Shakespeare translations into Estonian (this is not to say the aspects would not be well-applicable to the translations into any language):

- the objective of the translations as to be pronounced on stage, to be *heard* rather than *read*;
- the factor of a nation's self-awareness and manifesting itself as an independent one via having its "own Shakespeare";
- and, last but not least, the issue of the age of translations, especially the translations of theatre texts that need to be "in tune" with the use of language of the era in which they are delivered on stage (with the exception, of course, of texts with marginalised use of language, specific for some certain era, but this only works when done on purpose, not when using an out-dated translation for a contemporary stage production). This aspect can also be seen as every *generation's* need for their "own Shakespeare".

Also, it is important to stress that a translation is always the carrier of the *translator's own voice* – as Willis Barnstone has said, translating is a double art that has at least two authors (Barnstone 1993: 88), or, borrowing from Peeter Torop: "a translation is always first and foremost an *implicit* critique of the original" (Torop 1999: 20).

In order to illustrate these aspects, brief examples will be brought from two different translations of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night or What You Will* into Estonian, namely translations by Georg Meri (published in 1960) and by the team Peeter Volkonski and Hannes Villemson (made in 1998 for a production of the play in the theatre Vanemuine),

with the aim to show that the translations are the children of their time and their translators, carrying the voices of both the era and the translators as co-authors themselves.

As to the first aspect – the one of a drama text’s utterability on stage – since Meri’s translation, as said before, is often rather literal and tends to use commentaries and footnotes, the translation by Volkonski and Villemson, on the other hand, is quite self-sufficient. They manage to convey what Shakespeare has said within the lines of the characters and need not rely on footnotes. This gives the latter translation an undoubted privilege for use on stage. Also, there are instances of Shakespeare’s masterful wordplay that are very difficult to translate by any translator. In such cases, when the wordplay proves untranslatable (for a certain translator), the next best solution would be to replace the instance by a humorous line. Yet this seems to be the weak point of Meri’s translation. And the strength of Volkonski and Villemson, as the following example would show:

Fabian. Nay, I’ll come: if I lose a scruple of this sport,
let me be **boiled**³ to death with **melancholy**. (II.v.2–3)

MERI

Fabian: Jaa, jaa, ma tulen; kui
lasen sellest naljast raasukesegi kaotsi minna, siis **keetke**
mind surnuks **melanhoolias**.

VOLKONSKI & VILLEMSON

Fabian: Juba tulen – **keegu** mu **ihumahlad püreeks**, kui
mul ükski nalja-raasuke kaotsi peaks minema.

In order to understand the homophonic wordplay of the source text, one needs detailed knowledge of Elizabethan English: the words “boil” and “bile” had a similar (if not identical) pronunciation. “Bile” in Greek is “khole” and “mela(n)khole” is, of course, “melancholy”, signifying “black bile” that in medieval medicine was one of the constitutional/ psychological ‘humours’ (Nash 2001: 76). Therefore, Fabian’s line, in addition to its primary reading, includes another one, that forwards the following complicated structure – already before the word “melancholy”

³ Emphases (here and elsewhere) in the examples are by the author of the article.

is uttered by him, it is implied to via its Greek origin in the word “boiled”. As Nash has put it: “This is indeed a learned pun [...]” (Nash 2001: 76).

Probably both translators have considered this pun to be quite impossible to translate into the target language. In such a case, the next step might be maintaining (or re-creating) the comic potential of the lines in the target text. It seems that both Estonian versions have tried to maintain some sort of humour in this fragment of the text, but in Meri’s translation it simply does not serve this goal, as there is no meaning or humour in it. Meri has translated the lines of Fabian as follows: “Yes, I’ll come; if I lose a scruple of this sport, boil me to death in melancholy”. This is a word for word translation which results in an empty phrase. Volkonski & Villemson, though they have not been able to maintain the pun either, have managed to make the lines humorous in Estonian, also keeping one of the source text’s pun’s keywords, “boil”, which in Estonian is “keetma”. In their version Fabian says: “I’m coming – let my bodily juices be boiled to a purée if I lose a scruple of this sport”. “To be boiled to a purée” is an expression in Estonian, though not common in everyday speech, but recognizable enough, and it means something similar to “may I be damned if...”. In addition the translation mentions “bodily juices”, which is a playful and, indeed, educated hint to the wordplay in the source text.

As for the fact that translations age – on the example of *Twelfth Night*, a play, what is more, a *comedy* – the genre that serves the purpose of amusing the audience – this is only possible when the play speaks to its audience. Humour needs to be fresh but certain expressions and objects of humour tend to alter a great deal in time. Therefore, for today’s audience, the translation by Volkonski and Villemson gives more opportunity to laugh (of course, in a decade or two there is quite probably again a need for a new translation for the then contemporary productions(s), more in tune with the language as it will be used then). The following example is to illustrate the above-mentioned claim about expressions’ out-dating and the humorous effect’s lessening resulting due to that:

Sir Toby. **Accost**, Sir Andrew, **accost**.

Sir Andrew. What's that?

Sir Toby. My niece's chambermaid.

Sir Andrew. **Good Mistress Accost**, I desire better acquaintance.

Maria. My name ise Mary, sir.

Sir Andrew. **Good Mistress Mary Accost** –

Sir Toby. You mistake, knight. "**Accost**" is front her,
board her, woo her, assail her. (I.iii.48–56)

MERI

Sir Toby: **Tee serva**, sir Andrew, **tee serva**!

Sir Andrew: Kes see on?

Sir Toby: Mu õetütre toaneitsi.

Sir Andrew: **Väärt neiu Teserva**, tahaksin teid tunda lähemalt.

Maria: Minu nimi on Maria, sir.

Sir Andrew: **Väärt neiu Maria Teserva**...

Sir Toby (*tasakesi*): Te eksite, rüütel: "**tee serva**" tähendab tiku ligi, löö külge, kosi teda, asu pihta.

VOLKONSKI & VILLEMSON

Sir Toby: **Litsu ligi**, sir Andrew, **litsu**!

Sir Andrew: Mis mõttes?

Sir Toby: Igas mõttes, see on ju toatüdruk!

Sir Andrew: **Armas preili Litsu**, oleks meeldiv teiega lähemalt tuttavaks saada.

Maria: Minu nimi on Maria, sir.

Sir Andrew: **Armas preili Maria Litsu**...

Sir Toby: Sa said valesti aru, rüütel. "**Litsu ligi**" tähendab "löö külge", "anna takka".

The expression "tee serva" (to make advances) used by Meri in his translation, though rather wittily turned into Maria's last name, has fallen out of usage in the Estonian language. While its meaning would probably be understood by some people in the audience, it is more certain that most listeners would find it confusing and would not respond to it by laughing. The expression used by Volkonski and Villemson, "litsu ligi", on the other hand, is easily graspable and in addition the humorous potential is increased by the fact that the word "litsu" resembles the one "lits", a prostitute, which makes the situation

even more embarrassing for Sir Andrew Aguecheek who is always clumsy with words.

Finally, the “what is allowed” as in terms of a more harsh and bawdy use of language, varies in time. The matter of bawdy in Shakespeare’s own use of language is especially related to the central topic of this presentation – since in Meri’s translations this aspect of his language is rather neglected (it is difficult to say if this derives either from the taste and/ or demands of the era or the personal preferences of the translator, or, most likely, the combination of the two), I propose that it has been the key factor in building the myth of Shakespeare as an author first and foremost of high register, poetical and “clean” language. Not to say that these qualities are not characteristic of his use of language, but rather that they are just one side of it. As a contrast, the use of language in the translations by Volkonski and Villemson is rather bold but definitely not neglecting the other side, the poetical and high register use of language by Shakespeare. The following example is to illustrate the bawdy that is present in Shakespeare’s source text and in the translation by Volkonski and Villemson (perhaps even to the extreme) yet lacking totally in the translation by Meri.

Sir Toby. [...] Souls and bodies hath he divorced
three, and his incensement at this moment is so
implacable that satisfaction can be none but by
pangs of death and sepulchre. **Hob, nob**, is his
word: give’t or take’t. (III.iv.239–243)

MERI

Sir Toby: [...] Ta on kolm hinge ihust lahutanud ja praegu
on ta meeletus nii leppimatu, et teda rahuldavad vaid
surmakrambid ja haud... “**Peale, anna pihta!**” on ta
hüüdsõnad, võtke või jätke.

VOLKONSKI & VILLEMSON

Sir Toby: [...] Kolm hinge on ta juba ihust lahutanud ja
praegu on ta siuke mõtsaline, et ilma surmakrampide või
kabelita ta ei lepi. Tema sõjahüüd on “**türa-müra**”, nii et
vaata ise, kuidas hakkama saad.

While in Meri’s version Sir Toby says (in the words highlighted by the author of this article) simply “go for it”, Volkonski and Villemson have

him utter an expression that includes the word “türa” which is a vulgar synonym for the male sexual organ. Such choices are most probably the reason why their translations are considered too bold in their use of language. However, there is no doubt that such expressions are central to many of Shakespeare’s plays, especially the comedies. And it befits the use of language of Sir Toby, who certainly does not censor his choice of words, especially so in the scenes when he is more or less drunk (which is the case in most of the scenes where he is present). Certainly it can be questioned whether such extreme choices by the translators Volkonski and Villemson are always justified, yet it should *not* be questioned that the texts of Shakespeare allow such interpretation, and the final result is in the hands of the translator(s) as co-author(s).

As a conclusion I would like to stress that we should not see different translations as simply rivals competing with each other and ruling each other out but rather as a widening of options. After all, as drama texts as well as their translations are not the “end products” but material for further work that only begins when a stage director chooses a play to produce and commences work on it with actors, artists, sound engineers, etc., he or they should also be able to choose a translation that best suits the concept of the corresponding play’s stage version. There are the translations for page and the translations for stage, the first remaining as records of the (translating) culture of their era, yet it cannot be questioned that new productions in a changed cultural environment need new translations.

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Borges' Self-Myth and Peculiarities of its Translation

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Fictional worlds

In a fictional narrative the narrator is a fictional entity who cannot perform real illocutionary acts. Although the characters, events and places may be borrowed from real life, the speech acts about them are fictional. The author of a fictional narrative does not only depict events and characters but also the act of narrating, which is a double act, because the text has been written by an author, but the story is narrated by a fictional narrator, whose act of narrating the author is depicting/imagining. Thus fiction is about imagining the speech acts of some fictional character, the narrator. The real author is only "writing down" the speech which he has merely imagined and imagined not as his own speech but as that of somebody else, and that somebody is just his imagination, his character (Sutrop 1996; Martínez Bonati 1992).

Narrative worlds are universally characterized by their complete determination within the limits of the text in which they are being described; they are autonomous semiotic units existing independently from the "real" world; they are constructed not arbitrarily but following certain universal principles. (Doložel 1979: 195–196). The essence of fiction is linguistic, it does not exist outside the language: "El status ontológico de la ficción es un status lingüístico: entidades, seres, mundos, palabras, todo aquello de que trata el discurso, existe en cuanto nombrado" (Reyes 1984: 18). A fictional text is a semiotic object that includes and transmits the fictional world in its latent semantic possibility. The reader does not create the fictional world, but recreates the world hidden in the text by realization of the semantic potential of

the text. The text directs the interpretation process and the readers generally share the opinion about the structure and the components of the fictional world. (Doležel 1996, Miall 1990).

A common feature of the different theories about how the readers perceive and reconstruct the fictional worlds is proceeding from some extratextual world (the real world, experiences, another fictional world). According to Harsaw (1984), a literary text has its Internal Field of Reference that comprises characters, situations, ideas etc., which do not exist outside the language that creates them. Thus it is impossible to establish what happened "really", where the author has made a "mistake" or what were his/her "real" intentions, making it all dependent only on textual interpretation. But some of the meanings of the literary text may also be related to the External Field of Reference, and various objects, characters, cities etc. may be modelled on the basis of it.

Ryan's "principle of minimal departure" (1980) explains the reconstruction of narrative worlds as integral wholes by the reader in a similar way: the alternative world is always reconstructed as possibly most affined to the world we know. Thus the inclusion of geographic and historical names in fiction has the purpose of creating an effect of reality and at the same time these objects themselves become, to some extent, more unreal. Another fiction may also serve as a background for the reconstruction of the fictional world. Nevertheless, although the readers use the experience of extratextual worlds to interpret fictional worlds and frequently the names and the places coincide in these two worlds, they are not connected to each other in any other way.

According to the semantics of possible worlds, the fictional worlds are possible states of things, they are populated by possible yet not real characters, but the possible world has no connection to the real world, that is, the characters and places, whose names coincide with the ones existing in the real world, are not the same as in the real world, and they are ontologically homogeneous with the characters and places that have no counterpart in the real world. For example, the character called Borges is no less fictional than Pierre Menard or any character with an imaginary, fictional name. So there is no basis to maintain that in the fictional world there are "real" and "fictional" characters (Doležel 1997: 79–80). Fictional worlds "borrow" details of the real world for their construction, but these details must undergo a change in order to "cross the line" between these two worlds.

Instead of the notion of truth, which the reader has to ascertain in order to reconstruct the fictional world, it is more common to speak about authenticity (Doležel), valid only within the limits and according to the laws of this fictional world. The author, the speaker generally possesses enough authority to validate the factual domain in a certain narrative world, the assertions of the narrator are truthful and definitive in the world they construct, a given fictional world is specifically like described by the narrator (Reyes 1984: 18; Martínez Bonati 1992: 34). The reader accepts the assertions of the narrator about the fictional world unconditionally due to the fact that only in this way the reading of a fictional text acquires an aesthetic meaning. The veracity of the assertions by the narrator does not thus derive from deduction or empirical verification, but from the norm of transhistorical productive mental activity (Martínez Bonati 1992: 37). The narrator, however, is not the author, but a fictive entity whose act of narrating the author is imagining and describing. A first-person narrator is a narrator-character, not the producer of linguistic signs (Pozuelo 1993). The reader derives information about the narrator and his way of representing the information intratextually, through allusions and stylistic devices and not from a great amount of linguistic and non-linguistic information that accompanies real situations and speech acts. The narrator is, paradoxically but inevitably, an element of his own narration (Bradford 1997: 72).

The structure and the veracity of the fictional world depend on the authority of the narrator, but the narrator can also fracture and weaken this authority. First-person narratives have a quite weak narrator authority in themselves. If authentication is the transformation of a possible state of things into a fictionally existing one through a literary speech act, the first-person narrator has relatively less power of authentication. If the authority of an anonymous third-person narrator is conventionally guaranteed, a first-person narrator must prove his authority, offering, for example, a certain amount of data about his sources. He may also express his limited access to the events of the fictional world through doubts and fill the gaps with conjectures, guessing and hypotheses, which are non-authentic categories. A first-person narrative world is not a world of absolute narrative acts, but an authentic world of the narrator's beliefs. Thus, the fictional world may remain partly or totally unauthenticated (Doležel 1997: 111). But doubting about the authenticity of the fictional world is not a

destructive process, but opens up new dimensions of meaning, because it makes the whole concept of fictional existence problematic. (Doležel 1997a: 117).

In cases where the authority or the authentication capacity of the narrator is intentionally weakened, the integrity of the fictional world becomes dubious for the reader and access from the Actual World to Textual Actual World, which presumes the will and capacity of the narrator to validate the acts of the textual world, is limited or impossible (Ryan 1997: 194). The auto-annulling narratives are games with fictional reality which, on the one hand, seems to have been created by authentication; on the other hand, however, the status of that reality is queried because the authentication mechanism itself is presented as pure conventionality. It is impossible to ascertain what there is and what there is not in these kinds of fictional worlds. The worlds where the narrator does not possess full authority, refer to the limits of fiction, the conditionality of these worlds: "Without any doubt, it is most worrying to deny the narrator's authority: when nobody tells the fictional "truth", if in a world created by designation, designation itself is contradictory, the fiction remains half-constructed, in an irresolute existence and is still twice as fictional, since it dares to explore what even within the limits of the fiction is impossible" (Reyes 1984: 26).

Borges' autofictions

Borges is known for the rejection of psychologism in his work and for his intellectual writing. Even so, in quite a few texts there appears a character named Borges, revealing some of the writer's existential problems and anxieties and supporting the creation of a certain myth about Borges. There are stories with Borges and his double ("El otro", "Borges y yo"); real autobiographies ("Un ensayo autobiográfico"; texts in memory of his ancestors ("Los Borges"); fictions where a character named Borges appears as a witness to fantastic events ("El Aleph", "El Zahir"). A fifth type might be a short story narrated by a third person but where the main character has common biographical data with the real author, Borges ("El Sur").

Some of the most intriguing stories by Borges are the so called autofictions where the first-person narrator is somebody called Borges,

who is writing a story we are reading at this very moment ("Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius"; "El Aleph"; "El Zahir"; "La otra muerte"; "Historia del guerrero y de la cautiva"; "Funes, el memorioso"). Those stories with the "fictional" Borges are also the most interesting from the narratological point of view, because they are playing with the reader, with the limits of fiction, with the illusion of reality; the writing process is transformed into a part of fiction, where an interlacing of different kinds of versions of "truths" takes place. It is as if Borges were addressing the reader and talking to her/him, but in the end the reader will be left with empty hands. If normally an author or a narrator intends to create a coherent fictional world, here Borges ignores those rules and plays between the two worlds.

Use of the name of the author as the name of the narrator (often through irony) is one of the possibilities of making the fantastic truthful and at the same time it makes the person of the author himself unreal. Simultaneously, it makes the reader question about the relationship between reality and fiction. Thus we may see that the narrator, the fictional Borges, produces from his position of relative authority contradictory statements with the help of metafictional remarks, which consist of permanent doubts, suppositions, explanations, corrections and specifications that emphasize the conditional nature of the fictional world: "Reflexive doubt reduces the force of the narrated and, at the same time, makes the *narrative conscience* appear to the reader" (Martínez Bonati 1992: 83). Sometimes Borges goes even further, implying that what he is writing, is not only fiction but is false (fictitious) even in the fictional world, being thus non-fiction and possibly true in another (real?) world ("La otra muerte"). Those meta-level comments (in this case, about the act and words of the narrator himself) are called "over-justifications" by Prince: "But perhaps the most revelatory signals and at times the most difficult to grasp and describe in a satisfactory way are those we shall call [...] *over-justifications* (*surjustifications*). Any narrator more or less explains the world inhabited by his characters, motivates their acts, and justifies their thoughts: "If it occurs that these explanations and motivations are situated at the level of meta-language, meta-commentary, or meta-narration, they are over-justifications" (Prince 1996: 196).

In this kind of a text where the narrator shares the same name with the real author, moves in the same places where the real author used to go to, among the characters with the names of real historical persons,

the reader has to resolve a question about positioning the story on the scale between the autobiographical narrative and pure fiction: "The narrating persona of the fictions is thus often both supposedly autobiographical self and an elaborately created persona indistinguishable from that self. The reader is left to ponder the question whether (s)he is dealing with a standard fictional device or with the metaphysical problem of the existence and nature of the "real" Borges. (Dipple 1988: 52). According to Hamburger (1986), in first-person narratives only the context and not the form of the text helps the reader to decide if he is dealing with fiction or autobiography, according to the semantics of possible worlds these are homogeneous, none of the fictional characters is more "real" than the others and in Bonati's (1992) opinion there is an ontic insuperable distance between the real author and the narrator, and this enables the author to practise irony towards his fictional narrator or speaker. A narrator who presents himself as the real author is only a special case of the fictionalisation of historical or famous persons.

In Genette's opinion, Borges the author and Borges the narrator are not functionally identical: The Borges who is an author, a citizen of Argentina, and almost a Nobel laureate, and who has signed his name on "El Aleph" is not functionally identical to the Borges who is the narrator and hero of "El Aleph" even if they do share some (not all) of the same biographical features" (Genette 1990: 768). According to his transformation of the classic homodiegetic model of the relations between the author, narrator and reader, Borges, the author, is not the same as Borges, the narrator, but is the same as Borges, the character. According to this paradoxical model, the narrator, whose act of narrating the author is imagining, is fictional, but the relations between the narrator and the character are at least ambivalent as Genette puts it: "I, the author, will now tell you a story, where I'm the main character, but what never happened to me" (ib. 768-769), to which we could add: and has probably never happened or is not true at all.

Autofictions are also certain metafiction, fiction in fiction, which in Borges' opinion excites the reader precisely due to the indistinguishable interweaving of fictionality and reality, questioning the identity of the reader himself as well: "¿Por qué nos inquieta que Don Quijote sea lector del Quijote, y Hamlet, espectador de Hamlet? Creo haber dado con la causa: tales inversiones sugieren que si los caracteres de una ficción pueden ser lectores o espectadores, nosotros, sus lectores o

espectadores, podemos ser ficticios" (Borges 1989a: 47). Metafiction allows us to use the devices of realism, acknowledging at the same time its conventionality, and the voice of the author appears here not as the holder of all the information but as part of fiction: "...the more nakedly the author appears to reveal himself in such texts, the more inescapable it becomes, paradoxically that the author as a voice is only a function of his own fiction, a rhetorical construct, not a privileged authority but an object of interpretation" (Lodge 1990: 43). Thus, the result of this kind of (auto)metafiction is, above all, demonstration of the conventionality of fiction.

In Elizabeth Dipple's opinion those autofictions serve as counter-arguments to the point of view according to which the narratives of Borges are coldly intellectual: "In many other stories where the first-person narrators are identified as Borges, the same rich ambiguity pertains and creates a semi-provable counterbalance to the negative judgement some critics have made of him as a coldly aloof, totally intellectualized writer. For the interesting thing about Borges as persona in all of his writings – stories, poems, and essays – is the projected warmth and sense of tragic presence. This very presence may be a contrived fiction, and particularly so in the light of Borges' repeated statements of human nonreality and instability. More than any other contemporary writer, Borges has rendered himself as a creature of the page" (Dipple 1988: 52). For example, mixture of irony and tenderness in "El Aleph": "Beatriz, Beatriz Elena [...] Beatriz perdida para siempre, soy yo, soy Borges" (Borges 1989: 624).

Although the structure of all the autofictions by Borges does not follow exactly the same pattern, they frequently share common features and plot elements. The reader is a witness for the writing and narrating process in the course of which the narrator becomes a witness to some astonishing events or facts. He then tries to find an explanation to those events or facts but realizes that the explanation can only be supernatural although he presents it in the most natural way, resigning himself to be the discoverer of frightening proofs about the invalidity of the accepted laws of space and time.

The story is told in real time, when the narrator Borges has just begun to write a (fantastic) short story. "Hasta fines de junio me distrajo la tarea de componer un relato fantástico" ("Zahir"); "La fiebre y la agonía del enterriano me sugirieron un relato fantástico sobre la derrota del Masoller" ("La otra muerte"). When the main events have

taken place and the circumstances have been described, the narrator starts to draw conclusions and hypotheses: "Arribo, ahora, al inefable centro de mi relato; empieza, aquí, mi desesperación de escritor" ("El Aleph"); "Aquí doy término a la parte personal de mi narración" ("Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius"); "Paso ahora a las conjeturas" ("La otra muerte"). The narrator also expresses his doubts about the events that have taken place or about the narrator's memory of these events ("Sospecho que en mi relato hay falsos recuerdos"; "La otra muerte"), his subjectivity or insecurity in writing down the story ("El estilo indirecto es remoto y débil"; "Funes el memorioso") and his extraneous and somewhat distant role in the described events: "Me limitaré a recordarlas" ("Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius"); "Básteme recordar o mencionar" ("Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius"); "No trataré de reproducir sus palabras, irrecuperables ahora. Prefiero resumir con veracidad las muchas cosas que me dijo Ireneo" ("Funes el memorioso"). The narrator then adds complementary yet relevant information: "Dos observaciones quiero agregar" ("El Aleph"); "Algunos hechos más debo registrar" ("La otra muerte") and presents his opinion about or his explanation to the events: "Doy mis razones" ("El Aleph"); "Lo adivino así" ("La otra muerte"). Sometimes part of the (most important) information has been presented as a postscript written years later: "*Postdata del primero de marzo de 1943*" ("El Aleph"); "*Posdata de 1947*" ("Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius").

The events or circumstances taking place in autofictions are strange and astonishing for the narrator and after trying to find a more or less rational explanation for them, he realizes that these events have started to live a life of their own, which becomes evident frequently only in the future: "Entonces desaparecerán del planeta el inglés y el francés y el mero español" ("Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius"); "Hacia 1951 creeré haber fabricado un cuento fantástico ya habré historiado un hecho real" ("La otra muerte"); "Antes de 1948, el destino de Julia me habrá alcanzado" ("Zahir"). These events affect him although he tries to ignore it: "En cuanto a mí, entiendo no correr un peligro análogo" ("La otra muerte"); "pero algunas circunstancias mitigan ese privilegio temible" ("La otra muerte"); "En las horas desiertas de la noche, aún puedo caminar por las calles" ("Zahir"); "Yo no hago caso" ("Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius"). The narrator admits here that he is not capable of describing or explaining the reality, but it is also where his strength

lies: he may play with the limits of understanding and language (Bulacio de Médici 1997: 78).

Speaking about modality in Borges' autofictions, it seems that the prevailing line is, according to Simpson's (1993) categorization, an epistemic, negative modality characterized by epistemic modal adverbs, expression of doubts about (the veracity of) the feelings of the narrator and the events described by him (by means of parentheses and specifications, explanations and hesitations), absence of evaluative adjectives, all of which leave an impression of ignoring the implicit reader. It is an inner narration of a narrator, but it appears as if the narrating takes place from outside, without knowing exactly what goes on inside. Borges' narrator distances himself even when participating directly in the events. It may be interpreted as Borges' lack of interest or even disdain towards psychologism in literature. Baranecchia (1967) calls it "a style of doubt and conjecture" (*estilo de la duda y de la conjetura*). The doubts indicate that narrating is not an immediate transcription of reality, but someone's version of this reality and thus not infallible. The avoidance of obtruding his own opinion is also an expression of a certain respect towards the reader but also the fear of an erudite and shy person for an assertive expression of his thoughts and, above all, his feelings. Borges rejects the affirmative-assertive style and emphatic tone, and the excessive fluency of colloquial expression and verbal abundance are completely uncharacteristic of the vigilance and self control that Borges imposes upon himself. The parentheses interrupt the thread and draw the attention of the reader to the fact that everything can have a different interpretation. Next to the narrator there is always his other self who observes and comments on the narrator's narrating.

Although adjectives play an important role in Borges' texts, common evaluative adjectives are absent, there are his own adjectives, evaluative and neutral at the same time – abstract, learned adjectives that reflect rather a world view of the author/narrator merely represented by concrete episodes (*el temor de multiplicar los ademanes inútiles*). The adjectives are placed in a way that makes them seem neutral (*recuerdo la impresión de la incómoda magia*) or may be expressed through irony (*mi deplorable condición de argentino*). Other device of the narrator's distance and neutrality is nominalisation by which the narrator avoids positioning himself as the cause or the experiencer of events and which enables him to express his feelings

indirectly (in "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius", for example, the encyclopaedia is the subject, the actor (*American Cyclopaedia la registraba*); in "La otra muerte" the protagonist Pedro Damián is only an object of different events, circumstances and feelings (*La revolución de 1904 lo tomó en una estancia*); the expression of affirmation through negation (litotes) in order to avoid saying things directly (*el pasado, que ahora no es menos plástico y menos dócil que el porvenir*).

Hence, the most outstanding stylistic devices here are perhaps constant doubts about his memory, about the rightness of his opinions; creation of the image of a writer who is presenting his version of the events to the reader with caution and modesty and trying to stay intellectual, distant and calm when meeting the facts that change the world order in front of his eyes. Other elements that support this striving for distancing and abstraction are implicit conjunctives (juxtaposition, use of the semicolon); the collocation of adverbials or modal adverbs, separated by commas at the beginning of a sentence or as a parenthesis between the subject and the predicate, so that the text becomes to a certain extent fragmentary and the process of narrating immediate; the use of non-finite verb forms. Other relevant stylistic devices are the recurrence of key words, which are used both in direct and in figurative meaning, and which express the borgesian world view; figures of speech (metonymy, oxymoron).

Translation and narratological structure

In translation, contrary to the widespread belief, the narratological structure of the text is not retained, but the translator also comes into the picture to form part of the reading process and the translator's voice is always more or less, heard, although there is a tendency to ignore or forget about it: "It would appear that a narrative structure is the most universal of structures, talking about literature and its features is the most universal of discourses, and translation is only the removal, and addition, of a thin, unfluential linguistic film which has no bearing on what is underneath." (Schiavi 1996: 2). Narratology does not distinguish between the original text and the translated one because of the illusion about the translation as a transparent text that coincides with the original and where only one "voice", the same as in the

original, is speaking: "given the dominant conception of transparent translation in modern fiction, the reader's awareness of reading a translation lies dormant, leaving intact the notion that (with the exception of embedded narrative and character speech) there is only one narrator speaking at any one time" (Hermans 1996: 33).

When a literary work reaches the reader, the intentions of the real author have become a textual artefact, and the reader is directed through the text by the implicit author whose message is intended for the implicit reader. The text is transmitted by a narrator to whom the "voice" of the text belongs. The implicit reader creates/interprets the text according to presuppositions (language, cultural conventions) he shares with the implicit author, using the relation between the narrator (the voice) and the addressee as an instruction. But the implicit reader does not share the same language with the implicit author and there appears a gap in the classical narratological model (Booth 1961). Here the translator enters into the schema that adopts the role of an implicit reader and produces the translated text from this point of view. Schiavi (1996) presents the narratological structure of the translation where appears the implicit reader of the translation who receives the set of presuppositions activated by the implicit translator (translation norms and conventions) and the set of presuppositions about the fictional world activated by the implicit author of the source text and mediated by the implicit translator: RA.. |..IA – [N – AD – IR/real translator –] – implicit translator – N – AD – IR of the translation.. |..RR (RA= real author; IA= implicit author; N= narrator; AD – addressee; IR= implicit reader; RR= real reader). The voice of the translator intervenes in the narrative to adapt the information in the text for the reader different from the reader of the source text.

In the case of first-person narratives this circumstance is especially remarkable, because it is the narrator who is communicating with the reader and offering him information. In what way and to what extent the narrator does it and how he presents him/herself to the reader through it, depends, in case of the translation, to a remarkable extent also on the translator. We may even say that the voices of the narrator and the translator interlock indistinguishably in the translated text. Thus, the translator of Borges' auto-fictions participates directly in the creation of the self-myth of Borges and as the fictional world here is built up with subtle, interwoven devices and its balance can be destabilised, the style and the attitude of the narrator towards the

narration also determine the essence of the fictional world. In other words – how something is said becomes part of what is said and the role of the translator must not be underestimated. Thus, when we are dealing with the narrator called Borges, and through this device a certain writer's myth is created, we must take into consideration that in translation it is not exactly the same voice and the same narrator who is talking to us.

In translation, the main difficulty lies in maintaining this distant style, because the temptation of a translator seems to be to create a narrator who is more self-confident, affable or familiar to the reader. A few other elements to consider are the interrupted syntax structure, the learned vocabulary, modality, repetitions, the thematic structure, connectives, etc. The translations (into Estonian) we observed tend to make the syntactic structure more coherent, orderly and logical as well as to use colloquial vocabulary mixed with the learned one, to eliminate repetitions, etc. Paradoxically enough, slight changes in the style of the narrator, which at first sight may seem to be of no importance from the point of view of the story, can nevertheless change the whole nature of the narrator and the autofiction as well as the idea of the self-myth Borges has created in his work. Whatever the translation is like, the narrator presents himself to the reader of this translation in a different way, which in this case brings along a change of the Borges' self-myth.

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Literary Myths and Their Dramatic Transgression on the Theatrical Stage

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I must admit that if one proceeds from the definition provided by the Estonian Dictionary of Literary Language, which states that myth is 'a traditional image of the origin of the world and social phenomena and the supernatural creatures that have caused it' (EKSS 1994), then the classical mythology – stories about Titans, Hercules, Theseus, etc., that I have heard in my life do not, in my understanding, correspond to that definition.

That is primarily due to the fact that I do not perceive them to be traditional. Secondly, they are not my imagery. These stories have not reached me as passed on by my ancestors, but as read in books, and I in no way see them as stories of the origin of the world or social phenomena. A clear example of this is the fact that my first contact with classical mythology was not with the stories themselves, but with Edith Hamilton's book entitled *Mythology* (Hamilton 1975), which retells those stories. It was not even for the myths themselves, but as a reference book that I read it, eagerly. Incidentally, the distinctive feature of that book is that Hamilton particularly emphasises different means of rendition. For me classical mythology has, even later, always been inseparable from authorship; these are texts that have reached me through Homer, Hesiod and especially Ovid.

When I think of my tradition-based image of the origin of things, then as a child who grew up in the Soviet period, I have been more instilled with Soviet mythology. Thus I could, for instance, offer a rather different story as an example, on that I hear in my childhood, about Lenin, Stalin and Brezhnev riding a train, when the rails end. Lenin recommends listing the rails that are behind the train in front of the train, and move forward that way. The way ahead is, however, very

arduous, and the railway workers are soon completely exhausted. Then Stalin vows to shoot all those who are not working at full speed. This makes it possible to move a little way forward, but soon there are no workers left, and the train is once again at a standstill. Then Brezhnev suggests just rocking the train to give the impression of it moving. This is, of course, an anecdote and not a myth, but has much – in some deformed way – more of a mythical significance for me, because firstly, it has reached me through verbal rendition, it is not connected with any authors or written sources, but is a genuine popular creation; secondly, in contrast to the various stories of Titans who eat each other – which I cannot perceive as the beginning of the world – the above-mentioned story has a truth for me, because it completely explains to me the history and the methods of functioning of the Soviet Union, and I am almost prepared to believe that Brezhnev indeed made some such a suggestion, in a similar and comparable form.

I do not want to minimise the significance of classical mythology for the contemporary world, of course, through such a juxtaposition. I do, however, wish (and I will later explain my idea in greater detail) to emphasise its literary nature, and thereby its significant difference from those myths' place in the world, in which they were not subject to writing, which by nature – even though there may be variations – finalises and immortalises. Another important aspect – school education – should be added here. Classical myths no longer circulate among us independently of their 'teaching'. We are continually told how greatly the understanding of European culture is influenced by knowledge of classical literature. Yet the characteristic feature of any kind of school education is the reinforcement and then explanation, commenting and interpretation of discourse. From this we understand that the story about Brezhnev, which no one has canonised, will either one day fall out of circulation, because it (hopefully) no longer reflects the world that exists around us or (and this is more likely) it will be transformed into another story with altogether different characters; stories about classical heroes, however, are subject to altogether different interpretative processes, which do not influence the stories themselves from inside, but instead from outside; they no longer function as independent mythical texts, but as intertexts. In other words, in many cases in which we believe we are talking about myths, we are actually talking about how we talk about myths.

If, like Claude Lévi-Strauss in his book *Mythologiques* (volume IV), we wish to ascertain what is mythicism (*mythisme*), we must ask – with him – what it is that makes one myth *unforgettable* or *memorable*? Mythicism is what determines that a story that has been told by one speaker begins to live, loses something and gains something else during various retellings, and thus crystallises, in order to achieve some higher symbolic meaning that differentiates it from other stories. It is clear that whatever that is, a story's mythicism is determined by its ability to be passed on through speech, and is not at all related to books, texts, reference books, etc., which in themselves do not necessarily reduce that power, but do indeed prevent us from clearly recognising that mythicism. I would even go so far as to oppose mythicism and canonicalness – something that is mythical will not die, whereas something that is canonical is not permitted to die. But how can one distinguish between the two?

I would like to add another personal comment. A few of my friends recently travelled from Estonia to France by bus. The trip was very eventful, and one of the travellers sent an overview of the events to a common friend, who in turn forwarded the e-mail to me. What does that lead to? First of all a story has an author, i.e. authorship. As Marcel Proust vividly demonstrates, putting an emotion on paper can altogether destroy the emotion. Memory becomes literature.¹ From that point, what took place was no longer the transmission of the memory, but the transmission of a written text, i.e. what reached me was not a story that had been deformed, supplemented and had suffered omissions, but the production of one and the same authority.

We understand that if it had been transmitted orally it would have come to life, lost its authorship, become collective and altogether different, thus opening it up to potential mythologism, in this case that will not happen until someone decides to retell it.

I am far from taking cardinal positions concerning the modern world, which would postulate that we have lost the ability to tell stories, that the Internet is destroying literature or that literature is destroying folklore. As Pierre Bayard demonstrates in his book *How to talk about books we haven't read*, such a fear is unjustified, because despite the pressure of school education, people have an ability to confuse, forget

¹ Look for example the *Preface* of *Contre Sainte-Beuve* where he talks about the destructive influence of intelligence on the emotions. (Proust: 1954: 46–47)

and invent authors and events, and of course talk about things they know nothing about (Bayard: 2007). At the same time, one should not underestimate the contemporary media's ability to create myths with using simple methods (for either political or commercial objectives), appealing to the laziness of uncreative people, who instead of creative activity, simply reproduce already known facts. Before the arrival of the written word, even a stupid person had to be productive, if he wished to say something, in contrast to the present day, when technology offers many opportunities for mindless imitation.

Let us return to the topic of classical mythology. In the light of the above, we understand that these stories are influenced by two pressures: on the one hand, the above-mentioned manner in which they have reached us (through authors, peritexts, school textbooks and other canonising activity), but also in a more concealed manner, expressed in those stories that we tell each other every day, but cannot guess where they come from. The latter area is more interesting in the investigation of classical mythology, but it is also immensely more difficult. Many myths that surround us perhaps originate directly from classical myths, but instead have altogether different characters and different plots, which have in turn become mixed with contemporary myths, including myths from other cultures, because new myths arise every day. The works of Albert Camus offer a clear example of how the deformation of myths can be ignored. Camus was not satisfied with the world around him, and wanted to return to the godlike sun-loving Mediterranean type, to whom he contrasted the cold northern type and his rationalism. In other words, he draws a line between the former and the present, which is by nature completely incomprehensible. It is odd how, in the *Myth of Sisyphus*, for instance, Camus draws an excellent parallel between the classical world and the (absurd) contemporary world, yet explicitly refuses to recognise its clear connections with the trials of Christ. I do not wish to say that the trials of Sisyphus and Christ (or my story of Brezhnev's trials) are the same myth. It is, however, clear that all three stories use a characteristically human, symbolic manner of thought, which draws a parallel between a person's trials and their existence in this world. Thus the connections are perhaps much stronger than we may at first glance be able to guess.

An altogether different attitude to classical mythology can be seen in the works of Didier-Georges Gabily, one of the most distinctive contemporary playwrights. Gabily, who died in 1996 at a relatively

young age, was first and foremost a theatre educator and director, who discovered writing relative late in life, at the beginning of the 1990s. All of his plays, however, are borne in the same definite understanding of the functioning of the contemporary theatre. We must start from the fact that all of Gabily's activities were directed against theatre as representative art. That means that he refused to see the stage as an image, reflection or transmission of the world that surrounds us. According to Gabily, the word has two opposing forms. Firstly, a word can be a carrier of a certain ideology or governmental authority. And secondly, a word can destroy the ideology.² Much of the discourse that surrounds us is ideological. This means that the governing ideology forces its phraseology on us. In the words of Roland Barthes in his book *The Pleasure of the Text*, the expression 'dominant ideology' is nonsense, because those who are dominated do not have their own ideology; there is only one governing ideology with which the oppressed must accept even when they resist it (Barthes 2002: 219–261). Gabily concurs with this position, and like Barthes he sees literature and the text as a place in which the ruling ideology could reside. Barthes refers to the place where ideology is interrupted as the atopy of a text. For Gabily it has an even more concrete outlet – the stage.

Ideology can be stopped, because words do not have owners, and language has no master. If we can surpass the representativeness of language, we can return to the sources of language. In everyday society that is not possible, because power has occupied all levels of oral authority. A good example of this is Gabily's production *Tin Coffins* (1992), which demonstrates the influence of Soviet ideology on words: the widow of a soldier who died in the war in Afghanistan cannot speak, because Soviet ideology does not recognise it as a war – therefore it does not recognise the soldier, the death of the soldier or the soldier's widow. That which does not exist cannot be spoken. By gathering the widows' statements, Gabily makes their words heard. We can see that what is important here is not the performance as a political act against ideology, because in that case we would still be in an ideological confrontation and the performance would not take place – the performance does not actually allow the widows to speak, but

² About Gabily's idea of contemporary world look at the excellent book of Bruno Tackels *Avec Gabily* (Tackels 2003).

instead the actors, who express words that have been suppressed. The actors must not portray the widows, because it is not important to allow the widows to speak, for ideology has already irretrievably stolen that from them, but the relationship between language and the stage are primary. Thus Gabily can state that the soldiers who died are allowed to speak in the play (Gabily 2003: 61–62).

As a writer, Gabily places himself in exactly the same position. He does not set himself the objective of creating a discourse that is opposed to the ruling ideology, but he speaks as a witness through which the language's origin can speak. This permits us to understand why Gabily is interested in old myths. For him these myths contain the two levels mentioned above. On the one hand the ruling ideology that has deformed and incorporated those myths speaks through them, and on the other hand they have – before being made into literature – passed through the crystallising filter of oral tradition. On the stage it is possible, as with the widows of soldiers who fought in Afghanistan, to give words back their former power. The actors, never in Gabily's theatre, interpret or portray the mythical characters, but act as a kind of filter, so that the words from ancient times could be heard again today.

It is important to understand that in contrast to Camus, there is no nostalgia for former times here. On the contrary, as I have stated above, myth expresses something that cannot be forgotten. But we are unable to find that any more. Old myths have for us – for me – become literature, history. Actually, those myths live on, since they are unforgettable. The problem is that we no longer use the right words. Violence falls under the category of 'police news', and instead of war, we speak of 'peacekeeping operations'; obscenity has now become fiction (*belles-lettres*). And these are not euphemisms, but a gradual slipping in meaning, referential changes, which Baudrillard very strikingly describes in his book *Simulacra and simulation* (Baudrillard 1981).

Gabily's plays contain a very great amount of such illustration of the (1)auto-representative world. In the play that speaks most about myths, *Time Game* (*Gibiers du temps*, 1995), brings characters known from classical mythology, such as Phaidra, Theseus and Helena, but also familiar names and titles from elsewhere, such as John, Mary and the Archangel and some contemporary youths such as Léa, Agna and Georges. As one can see from the names of the characters, classical mythology, Christianity and the contemporary world (often criminal) are mixed in quite a crazy manner. Thus in his play, Phaedra is not a

young tragic heroine, but a horrible old woman, who uses up a new young man every year. Theseus is not a proud hero – we remember from mythology how he refused to board a ship, but decided instead to go on foot, and on the way killed all thieves – only in Gabily's play does he get stabbed, quite near the beginning, by girls. This is not just a humorous fabulation, although humour always has a definite role in the play, but Gabily bases the play on the idea that classical heroes – and of course myths – have not yet died. They continue to live their lives, and worse still, appear to have become accustomed to the modern world.

The key figure in the play is undoubtedly a character called the Pythoness. In Ancient Greece, the Pythoness was thought to bring mankind the voice of divine truth, but in Gabily's play no one attempts to understand her, her speech is considered absurd, and she eventually finds a place in a brothel called Aphrodite's Temple, where still no one listens to her, but people go to peek at her curves. But if the characters do not listen to her, the audience does. Such a solution may seem quite Brecht-like, were it not for the significant difference mentioned above. In contrast to Brecht, the plays of Gabily do not declare an ideological message. His Pythoness is not on the stage in order to criticise capitalist society and proclaim the benefits of Marxism, but to permit the audience to get inside the characters' minds. As a result, the Pythoness' discourse is of course not coherent, because her main objective is to make the play polyphonic, not to give it the 'right' meaning, but to make the audience ask and doubt.

One should remember that in Ancient Greece, it was forbidden for educated women to be pythonesses, because the Greeks feared that the influence of education would begin to distort the heavenly word. What the pythoness does in Gabily's play – in other words Gabily himself, of course – is to dust off old myths from under the layer of dust that school education has left. More precisely, the figure of the pythoness attempts to create two different *mise en abyme* on stage. The first is discursive, because the pythoness' speech is like an echo of what the other characters say. By nature repetitive, incoherent, emotional, poetic, she is in stark contrast to the other characters' more everyday and clear speech. We are thus in a situation in which – very simply speaking – incomprehensible speech explains comprehensible speech. Another *mise en abyme* is thematic. The pythoness brings to the play a past time that exists simultaneously with the play's present.

From literary theory we know that *mise en abyme* is a process through which time is stopped. As Michel Corvin states in one of his articles, which he has devoted to this phenomenon in the theatre, *mise en abyme* makes it possible to stop the linear progression of the plot of a play, in order to create a new mythical, truthful time-space. (Corvin 1986: 141–151) This helps us understand why Gabily is able to undertake what may at first glance seem such a daunting task – to go back to the origins of words, back to the true nature of myths. Because he commands the stage and actors. The composition of the play makes it possible for the actor to free himself of all intellectual and cultural knowledge. In the case of both Theseus and Phaedra, neither the actor nor the audience are able to seize on anything outside the play, since the protagonists do not reflect any conceptions, models, characters or psychology. Worse still, even within the play itself it is almost impossible to create any kind of clear, motivated plot line along which events take place. In addition, the puzzling pythoness is ever-present.

In other words, Gabily is able, thanks to the theatre, to create in the audience such contact with myths that is impossible outside the theatre. Maybe the theatre is today the only art form that is able to release language from the fetters of writing, bring the viewer into contact with the true nature of violence and, as Gabily hopes, thereby reduce the violence to be found around us.

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Repetition and Signification: The “Mythic” Influence in *All About My Mother* by Pedro Almodóvar

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It is not true that works are created by their authors.
Works are created by works, texts are created by text, all
together they speak to each other independently of the
intentions of their authors.

Umberto Eco

The present paper focuses on the text *All About My Mother* (1999) created by a really provocative director of the Spanish cinema, Pedro Almodóvar. He is considered to be a “women’s director”, investigating issues of gender, nationality and sexuality (Maddison 2000: 265). The authors of studies of *All About My Mother* always pay attention to the peculiarities of Almodóvar’s cinematic discourse and point out the colourful, glossy, striking visual images, dialogues with other culture texts, and complex storytelling (see Arroyo 1999, Maddison 2000; Smith 2000, Sofair 2001, Allison 2001, Acevedo-Munoz 2004, Kinder 2004/2005). However, the attention to the *what* always overbalances the attention to the *how* of the films and the conclusions are always connected with an attempt to explain the tension between “acting and living” (Sofair 2001: 44) as well as between writing and existential being.¹ The present paper, on the one hand, does not break down critical

¹ For example, Mark Allison argues that his book “is weighted more heavily to the *how* rather than the *what* of the films” (Allison 2001: 5). He pays attention to the peculiarities of discourse and points out that “Almodóvar

tradition – it “explains the tension between acting and living”, but, on the other hand, it suggests an attempt to look at the matter the other way round – to offer an intertextual analysis of *All About My Mother* (Todo sobre mi madre, 1999) in order to show how discursive strategies themselves are able to inscribe unexpected strategies of meaning.

The chosen method of intertextual analysis restricts the original theoretical program ‘invented’ by Julia Kristeva.² It “leads us to consider prior text as contributions to a code which makes possible the various effects of signification” (Culler 1983: 103) and allows exploring how the text produces these effects. In brief this process could be defined as follows: an element (fragment) of the text we read (intertextual quotation) points out the intertext (the cited text, the pre-text) and creates one of the possible dialogic strategies. The investigation of the strategy, in its turn, permits one to outline the mutual parts of a dialogic field and gives a certain direction to the signification process which is “corrected” by the further-reading process and the whole discursive structure of the text.

In order to define the effects of signification in *All About My Mother* it is worthwhile, first, to discuss the logic of the story (fabula), of the plot (siuzhet) and of the discourse of the film, and then to focus on the peculiarities of intertextual dialogue.

The story (fabula) as it can be reconstructed from the plot (siuzhet) of the film is as follows: Manuela, a woman in love with a man Esteban, suddenly discovers that her beloved has changed into a woman called Lola. It forces Manuela, pregnant with a child of Esteban-Lola, to leave Barcelona, so she escapes to Madrid. Her son is born there – she names him after his father. Esteban. Manuela herself becomes a medical nurse and works in the Ramón y Cajal Hospital as a Transplant

reworks and recontextualizes not only genres but also popular culture, especially music and television. Parodic recontextualization is not exclusively a source of humour: paroding television, advertising or folkloric music is one way of investigating and challenging gender or sexual roles, social or national identities” (ib.). This example (one, but far from the only one) reveals an attempt to connect the function of recontextualization (i.e. the function of intertextual dialogue) with the *thematic* issues of gender, nationality and sexuality.

² Various aspects of this restricted vision of intertextuality are discussed in: Riffaterre 1978, Genette 1978, Genette 1992, Eco 1979, Eco 1990, Eco 1992, Iampolski 1998, Allen 2000, Melnikova 2003.

Coordinator. Esteban dies on his seventeenth birthday in a car accident, and Manuela comes back to Barcelona to find Esteban's father, Esteban-Lola. In Barcelona, she meets Sister Rosa who is pregnant with a child by the same man – Esteban-Lola; Rosa dies on the delivery of her baby to whom his father has bequeathed his only legacy – the HIV virus. Manuela adopts the boy and goes to Madrid in the hope of getting him cured. In two years, she returns to Barcelona with her aim achieved – the child manages to fight the virus – and finds out that Esteban-Lola has died.

As we can see, *the story* is obviously framed by repetitions. It contains three sub-stories, every one of them with the triangle model of *mother-father-son* in it, every one of them with the name *Esteban* for one of the members of this triangle, and every one marked by a *death*: in the first sub-story – that of Manuela, Esteban-Lola (Esteban “the first”) and Esteban “the second” (Manuela’s son) – it is the *son* that dies; in the second sub-story – the one of Rosa, Esteban-Lola and Esteban “the third” (Rosa’s son) – the *mother* passes away; finally, in the third sub-story – that of Manuela, Lola-Esteban and Esteban “the third” (Rosa’s biological son, but Manuela’s son by adoption) – the *father* dies.

The plot reveals the same principle of repetition represented in a slightly diverse way:

- Esteban sees his mother on the other side of the road, hurries to her and is almost run over by a car he has not noticed; later on, Esteban rushes after a taxi and is actually run over by a car he does not see.
- Manuela performs the role of a relative of a dead person – of a potential donor – and she actually finds herself in that role when her own son dies.
- Manuela plays the part of Stella in a performance of *A Streetcar Named Desire* twice – in the first sub-story (when her husband is still alive and her son is not yet born) and after the death of her son.
- Manuela runs away from Barcelona to Madrid in order to save her son, and she does the same to save Rose’s Esteban. Etc.

The discursive layer of the text, in its turn, broadens and deepens the effect of the repetition game by the obvious intertextual quotation of three texts, namely Joseph Mankiewicz’s film *All About Eve*, the collection of sketches *Music for Chameleons* by Truman Capote, and Tennessee Williams’s play *A Streetcar Named Desire*. As a phenomenon, intertextual quotation is a playground for/of repetition: the text

we read repeats the fragment of another one. In *All About My Mother* this game is complicated and doubled. First of all, the three intertexts themselves are intertextual – they repeat other texts or have been repeated themselves; they form dialogic relations with other texts or they themselves have been engaged in such relations. Mankiewicz's cinematic narrative is based on the short story *The Wisdom of Eve* by Mary Orr (1947) and so by definition is in a dialogue with the literary text. The dedication of *Music for Chameleons* to Tennessee Williams sets up dialogic relations between the texts by Capote and Williams. Yet the most interesting text in the intertextual field of *All About My Mother* is *A Streetcar Named Desire*. On the one hand, it has become a basis for quite a number of cinematic texts³; on the other, Almodóvar's discourse displays the *Streetcar* in a very specific way – by quoting a repetition: the episodes of the performance we are invited to see are presented as those of the theatre performance of Williams's play, yet the characters speak the lines of the cinematic version of the *Streetcar* by Elia Kazan (1951), with an essentially different final scene⁴. Thus, all the three intertexts imply the idea of a dialogue between different arts, and Almodóvar's cinematic discourse multiplies repetitiveness by citing texts of different media (film, fiction, drama).

The other peculiarity of quotation worth special attention is the quantity and the order of citing. Capote is quoted only once. Fragments from the film by Mankiewicz appear twice, both times on the threshold of the text. The first quotation from *All About Eve* significantly links the titles of the two films and foregrounds the main theme – that of the creative and the social environment of a human desperately trying to achieve success. The second quotation (Margo Channing's evaluative remarks on autograph hunters) foretells Esteban's fate.

As to *A Streetcar Named Desire*, it intrudes into the cinematic discourse of *All About My Mother* four times. It marks the crucial moments of the plot and functions as a background defining the logic of the multiplied quoting. The first quotation shows Manuela and her son watching a performance of *A Streetcar Named Desire* in Madrid; they see the final episode of the eleventh scene when Stella has already had

³ Elia Kazan (1951); John Erman (1984); Glen Jordan (1995).

⁴ This issue in a totally different context was examined by Stephen Maddison in his article 'All About Women: Pedro Almodóvar and the Heterosocial Dynamic' (see Maddison 2000).

her son and says her last words "I'm not going back in there again. Not this time. I'm never going back. Never". The second quotation presents Manuela in Barcelona, after her son's death, watching the very last fragment of the same episode; she hears the same lines spoken when Blanche has already left the stage. Next, Manuela, as a personal assistant of Huma Rojo, watches an earlier episode of the eleventh scene of the play from behind the scene. Finally, Manuela herself plays Stella after her son's death but before she becomes Mother to Rosa's Esteban. The citation is that of the eighth scene of the play: it is Blanche's birthday, and Stanley Kowalsky gives her a ticket to Laurel; Stella is still expecting her baby.

Metaphorically, the logic of quotation may be explained as follows: the last sentence of the text is cited and the full stop mark is put, then we are given the sentence just preceding the last one, and finally – a sentence from the second part of the narrative. The direction of movement in quotation is obviously the reverse, starting at the end (Blanche has gone "followed by the Doctor and the Matron", and Stella, with the child in her arms, says her last words) and going to the beginning, when Stella is still pregnant.

Such reverse-movement of quoting, with an emphasis on the end of the quoted sequence, is repeated in the following:

- The movement of the plot is the reverse, as the plot actually begins with the death of Esteban ("the second" – Manuela's son) and ends with the enigmatic recovery of Esteban ("the third" – Rosa's Esteban). Manuela has to return to the past once more to play the role of the Mother as it is promised by the very last quotation of the intertext which is quoted the last (the episode from the eighth scene of the *Streetcar*, when Stella is still pregnant).
- The movement of the narrative discourse is the reverse: the opening shots of the film show unsuccessful attempts of reanimation, or the very end of a human life; meanwhile, the closing shots are those of a curtain raising while turning into the background for a dedication⁵ which conventionally is presented at the beginning of a text.
- The most obvious (yet, as we have seen, far from the only one) manifestation of the reverse nature of the cinematic discourse is the

⁵ "To Bette Davis, Gena Rowlands, Romy Schneider... to all actresses who have played actresses, to all women who act, to all men who act and become women, to all the people who want to be mothers. To my mother."

episode of the seminar when the video record of the role-play scene with the relatives of a potential donor is rewound, so the record of the scene is shown backwards.

The interrelation of the multiplied repetition and the reverse movement of the discourse establish the proleptic structure of the narrative⁶: every event of the plot and of the discourse anticipates an event in the future and at the same time every event of the future/present repeats the past, returns us to the past. According to Genette (Genette 1980: 73–74), prolepsis draws the reader's attention to significant elements, the significance of which s/he is unable to reveal and evaluate in the first reading of the text. This peculiarity of prolepsis calls into consideration the dramatic relations between the processes of writing/narration and of reading/reception. The proleptic construction of the narrative implies that the process of reading ought to begin at the final point; otherwise proleptic hints will remain mere elements of discourse, with only the function of an aesthetic effect and without any significance to the strategy of meaning derivation. Indeed, in the "traditional" mode of reading of the extremely proleptic narrative by Almodóvar, the largest majority of its discursive elements perform solely aesthetic functions. However, with the reversal of the mode of reading, i.e. in the "reading backwards", the same elements start functioning as those of signification.

Thus, Almodóvar's discourse encodes the reverse direction of reading which repeats the direction of movement in intertextual quotation and requires particular attention to the intertexts. And when the reader doesn't ignore this requirement s/he becomes able to fathom that the first intertext – *All About Eve* – establishes the principle scheme of the reverse logic of the narrative. The beginning of the plot of the film shows the end of the story – "Sarah Siddons Award for Distinguished Achievement in the Theatre" – and presents the awarded person, Eve Harrington.⁷ Then, the narrative retrospectively tells in what way the result shown in the opening scene has been achieved, and ends with the repetition of the beginning of the narrative – the award

⁶ Gérard Genette defines prolepsis as "any narrative maneuver that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later" (Genette 1980: 40).

⁷ Seymour Chatman analyses the opening scene of *All About Eve* as an example of description in the cinema when the film stops the story time, going for a description instead (see Chatman 1990: 47–49).

ceremony. The very final shots, in their turn, are proleptic and repetitive: they show a glimpse into the future – another young woman (Phoebe), with a glittering coat of Eve on her shoulders and with the award in her hands. She is in front of a mirror, and as she steps forward, myriads of her reflections – myriads of images of an awarded prize-winner – appear on the screen.

The second intertext – *Music for Chameleons* – along with the theme of a “centre-staged” creator given in the preface – proposes a synthetic vision of reality fusing literature and painting. In the first sketch of the collection with the same title *Music for Chameleons*, the narrator pays special attention to the colour⁸ and his dialogue-partner mentions the names of painters in the talk about the mirror “framed within a worn black leather case that is shaped like a book”:

It belonged to Gauguin. You know, of course, that he lived and painted here before he settled among the Polynesians. That was his black mirror. They were a quite common artifact among artists of the last century. Van Gogh used one. As did Renoir... To refresh their vision. Renew their reaction to color, the tonal variations. (Capote 1994: 7)

Here, we can see a repetition of yet another type – a dialogue between the intertexts. Van Gogh’s name reinforces the intertextual dialogue between *The Music* and the third intertext, the *Streetcar*, established by the dedication of the former to Tennessee Williams, for Williams’ play also mentions the same name and explains the significance of colours. The very beginning of the *Streetcar* presents a great number of colourful images (“The houses are mostly white frame, weathered gray”, “white stairs”, “white building is a peculiarly blue”, men “dressed in blue” (Williams 1947: 13), etc), and further on, when Blanche DuBois “translates” her achromatic name, the text displays the

⁸ ‘Chameleons. Such exceptional creatures. The way they change color. Red. Yellow. Lime. Pink. Lavender. And did you know they are very fond of music?’ She regards me with her fine black eyes. ‘You don’t believe me?’ ... She begins to perform a Mozart sonata. Eventually the chameleons accumulated: a dozen, a dozen more, most of them green, some scarlet, some lavender’ (Capote 1994: 7).

functionality of colours and underlines it in the stage direction of the third scene:

The Poker Night. There is a picture of Van Gogh's of a billiard-parlor at night. The kitchen now suggests that sort of lurid nocturnal brilliance, the raw colors of childhood's spectrum. Over the yellow linoleum of the kitchen table hangs an electric bulb with a vivid green glass shade. The poker players – Stanley, Steve, Mitch and Pablo – wear colored shirts, solid blues, a purple, a red-and-white check, a light green, and they are men at the peak of their physical manhood, as coarse and direct and powerful as the primary colors. (Williams 19947: 45)

The picture described is Van Gogh's *The Night Café (The Night Café in the Place Lamartine in Arles, 1888)*. It is the text "explained" by Van Gogh himself in the letters to his brother Theo:

I have tried to express the terrible passion of humanity by means of red and green. The room is blood red and dark yellow with a green billiard table in the middle; there are four lemon-yellow lamps with a glow of orange and green. Everywhere there is a clash and contrast of the most alien reds and greens (Roskill 1997).

This colourful dialogue between *The Music* and the *Streetcar* established by the intertextual allusions in both texts to Van Gogh, invites to give particular attention to the use of colour in *All About My Mother*. The very first shots show two tubes of a medical infusion bottle, the blue one supplying the vital liquid and the yellow one corked up. Manuela (giving information about a possible donor, i.e. about a man who has just passed away) is dressed in a blue medical coat, while her colleague on the other side of the phone-wire (who is about to inform a recipient about a possibility to survive) is in a yellow T-shirt. Further in the text the opposition of the two colours (of blue and yellow) is supplemented with another opposition – that of red and achromatic white: the words *Un film de* on the screen are white, and *Almodóvar* is written in red. Yet further, the walls of the sitting room where the mother and son watch *All About Eve* are painted in yellow, the son is dressed in a blue shirt, and his mother – in red. Finally, the

title of the film goes as follows: the words *All About My* appear in red, and *Mother* – in white.⁹

The opening scenes evidently seem to relate the colours to existential notions of life (traditionally – yellow); death (blue); and passion/desire (red). Yet, as it has been said above, the very opening shots of the film show the blue tube (the colour of death) supplying a “liquid of life”, whereas in the very last shot of the film which shows the curtain raising, red (desire and passion) dominates the screen. Hence the implied direction of the discursive movement is from blue to red – from death to desire. The way Almodóvar presents colours once more refers us to the intertext by Tennessee Williams: “Blanche (with faintly hysterical humor): They told me to take street-car named Desire, and then transfer to one called Cemeteries and ride six blocks and get off at – Elysian Fields!” (Williams 1947: 15) *All About My Mother* reverses the logic of Williams’s play: instead of a journey from Desire (the beginning) to Cemeteries (death, the end) Almodóvar’s discourse offers us a journey in the opposite direction – from Cemeteries (blue, death, the end) to Desire (red, the beginning). The reverse nature of direction (from the death to the “birth”/beginning) is confirmed by every sub-story of the film: the death of the son in the first sub-story (Manuela – Esteban-Lola – Esteban) makes possible the father’s “birth”,¹⁰ the death of the mother in the second sub-story (Rosa – Esteban-Lola – Esteban “the third”) makes possible the mother’s “birth”,¹¹ and, finally, the death of the father in the third sub-story (Manuela – Esteban-Lola – Esteban “the third”) makes possible the son’s “birth”.¹²

⁹ The official website of Almodóvar’s films displays several posters, which let us see that all of them represent the principle of color opposition in the title, but the colors are not the same (see Pedro Almodóvar. Official Website. URL: http://www.clubcultura.com/clubcine/clubcineastas/almodovar/eng/engpeli_madre.htm).

¹⁰ After her son’s death Manuela keeps her promise to find his father, who did not know he had a son, and goes to Barcelona. Her meeting with Esteban-Lola “forms” him as a father.

¹¹ The death of Rosa forces Manuela to be “born” as a mother for the second time.

¹² The death of the father symbolically signifies the recovery (the second “birth”) of the son.

In this way, the use of colours corresponds with the logic of the story and, at the same time, with the logic of the reverse movement of the narrative as a whole. However, how is the discursive movement 'from death to desire', from the end to the beginning to be understood? Moreover, how are the final shots of the film showing a red curtain rising – a clear sign of a beginning which is supposed to be followed by the performance proper – to be explained; what is it that the discursive hint at the back threshold of Almodóvar's narrative anticipates?

To suggest an answer we cannot ignore the common peculiarity of two main intertexts – *All About Eve* and *A Streetcar*, both of them existing in the cinema space in contrast to literary *Music for Chameleons*. Both intertexts are marked out as high-quality cultural "myths". The *Streetcar* as it is presented in Almodóvar's film received several awards: Williams's play won The Pulitzer Prize in the first year of its presentation, and Elia Kazan's film, shot in 1951 (the year of Almodóvar's birth), received twelve nominations and was awarded four Oscars.¹³ *All About Eve* was nominated for fourteen awards and won six Oscars.¹⁴ *All About Eve* – the first cited intertext which passes on its title to Almodóvar's narrative – shows the 'Sarah Siddons Award' (the first shot), then presents award recipient Eve Harrington, and then retrospectively narrates the story about her journey up to receiving the award, and, finally, the closing shots show Phoebe with a glittering coat of Eve's and with Eve's award. Myriads of images of "an awarded prize-winner" – her reflections in the mirror – cast her as predestined to repeat the "journey" of Eve.

And it is precisely while watching *All About Eve* that Esteban's mother asks him what he is writing. The son, his writing a little later in the narrative linked to Capote's authorial preface to *Music for Chameleons*¹⁵ (which has not received any awards), answers: 'the future Pulitzer Prize' (William's Prize for the *Streetcar*!). However,

¹³ Best Actress for Vivien Leigh, Best Supporting Awards to Kim Hunter and Karl Malden, Best B/W Art Direction (Richard Day), and Best Set Decoration (George James Hopkins).

¹⁴ Best Picture, Best Supporting Actor (George Sanders), Best Director (Joseph L. Mankiewicz), Best Screenplay (Joseph L. Mankiewicz), Best Sound Recording, and Best B/W Costume Design.

¹⁵ 'One day I started writing, not knowing that I had chained myself for life to a noble but merciless master. When God hands you a gift, he also hands you a whip; and the whip is intended solely for self-flagellation'.

Esteban's **literary** writing in the diegetic space of the film (he writes down the story in the note-book) transforms into the **cinematic** writing on the discursive level (image of his writing in the note-book transmutes into his writing on the camera while watching *All About Eve*). This transformation¹⁶ forces one to agree with Michael Sofair who validly argues that Almodóvar's filmic narrative is told from the point of view of Esteban, that we can identify Esteban with the camera as story-teller and interpret the narrative as a "representation of his bringing his story to perception" (Sofair 2001: 43). Thus, the narrator "bringing his story to perception" speaks about awarding, and the text links his narrative with awarded cultural "myths". This phenomenon implies a "mythic" influence of intertexts and suggests an unexpected explanation for the aim of the reversal game and for the meaning of the gesture of a beginning at the end of the film: the discursive proleptic hint on the back threshold of the text anticipates awarding of *All About My Mother* – Oscar for Best Film in a Foreign language, French Caesar for Best Foreign Film, Golden Globe for Best Film in a Foreign Language, and the award for Best Director in the Cannes Festival, etc.¹⁷. The study of the mode of representation allows for seeing the hidden meaning inscribed in the discursive strategy of the film. The message that this strategy conveys is: begin at the end, move from the dead to the alive, reanimate, start with a highly acknowledged cultural "myths" to make an attempt of your own, and you will be doomed to success – you will become a "myth".

Pedro Almodóvar organizes the text as a palimpsest structure requiring a transtemporal reading. The traces of earlier inscriptions not only do not need to be erased, but quite to the contrary, they need to be seen. The present here not only has to exist and communicate with multiple pasts but also to set up the dialogue with the future. *All About My Mother* compresses different time levels into one plane of legibility transforming the present into the past and the past into the future, into the red desire, into the *All About My Almodóvar* written in red at the very beginning.

¹⁶ Not the only one. Discourse represents Esteban as a story-teller (narrator) in different modes.

¹⁷ See the whole list of awards on the Official website of Almodóvar's films: Pedro Almodóvar. Official Website. URL: http://www.clubcultura.com/clubcine/clubcineastas/almodovar/eng/engpeli_madre4.htm

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Dionysian Metamorphosis in Derek Jarman's *Caravaggio*

JUEY-FU HSIAO

Derek Jarman (1942–1994) was a controversial yet highly recognized British Filmmaker.¹ He is controversial partly because as an openly gay filmmaker most of his works criticized the Thatcherite regime, whose propaganda advocated “Victorian” values.² He is controversial mostly because of the way he deals with the cultural heritage, especially the European/English Renaissance cultural heritage.³ However, Jarman’s 1986 feature film *Caravaggio*, chosen for the British Film Institute’s “Modern Film Classics”, could be an exception in terms of acceptability and popularity.

In this paper, I will analyze the Bacchic theme in this well-known film and argue that it is not the filmic biography that brings the filmmaker and the Italian painter Michelangelo Merisi Caravaggio (1571–1610) together. Instead, I propose that it is Bacchus, the Latin name for the Greek god Dionysus, who draws our attention to both artists and their works. That is, their affinity/affiliation starts with Bacchus, the wine-god. It is also Bacchus who would be a key figure

¹ It is difficult to categorize Jarman’s films according to Simon Field (1985) and Michael O’Pray (1996: 15). To have a detailed look at Jarman’s filmography, please refer to Tony Peake’s *Derek Jarman* (1999: 573–87).

² When explicating what Thatcherism involves in the social level, Lester Friedman says, “Socially, Thatcher defined her philosophy as incorporating decidedly ‘Victorian’ values” (xiii). This set of values celebrates self-reliance, individual duty, family discipline, and patriotism. It is believed (at least to the Left) that such values are no less than patriarchalism, racism and imperialist nostalgia (Friedman 1993: xiii–xiv).

³ Critics such as Jim Ellis, Michael O’Pray, David Hawks, Harlan Kennedy, Roger Wollen and Diana Harris and MacDonald Jackson all tackle the issue of Renaissance occult philosophy in Jarman’s works.

that takes our study back to the Renaissance discourse on "divine frenzy". Through this affiliation, Jarman establishes his "art of memory", which infuses the past with the personal, aesthetic, socio-political agenda to criticize the commercialism, patriotism and homophobia of the British cultural milieu throughout the Thatcherite era.

That is to say, through making a movie on Caravaggio Jarman tries to revive a hidden, repressed and almost forgotten cultural memory. This "counter-memory" needs to be activated to dismantle the homophobic ideology and then hopefully heal the wounds. This has to be done through the insight of an allegorist, the kind defined by Walter Benjamin, who proposes that the allegorist should mortify cultural works with a melancholic/ imaginative/ productive gaze to empty their meanings of status quo so as to create them anew.

I. Political Agenda of Counter-Memory

Jim Ellis in his "Queer Period: Derek Jarman's Renaissance" succinctly points out that differently from the dominant film genre in the 1980s, the so-called "heritage films", Jarman's films of the Renaissance (such as *Jubilee*, *The Tempest*, *The Angelic Conversation*, *Edward II*) should be examined as "queer period film".⁴ It is mainly because his films of the Renaissance are for the present, and insistently refer to the present, a tradition whose approach to history or historical subjects to which artists like Caravaggio also belong (Ellis 1999: 289).

Ellis further relates Jarman's filmic historiography to the one outlined and proposed by Rosi Braidotti.

'Following Foucault, I see resistance as a way of politically activating counter-memories, that is to say, sites of non-identification with or non-belonging to the phallogocentric regime. ... Thus the political function of the intellectual is closely linked to her/his capacity to bypass or deconstruct the linearity of time, in a set of counter-genealogical moves.' Jarman's films of Renaissance

⁴ According to Andrew Higson, "heritage films" are "period films that revisit privileged texts, eras, or sites of English nationalist tradition" (Ellis 1999: 289). See also Sarah Street (1997: 103-06).

constitute a series of such counter-memories, which functions as a challenge to the nostalgic, Thatcherite construction of England's glorious past in the cinema of 1980s. (Ellis 1999: 290)

According to Ellis, in order to activate counter-memories some crucial strategies are adopted in Jarman's films. First, some key Renaissance texts are redeployed and read against the dominant readings. This is achieved through disrupting the narrative and the use of anachronism. Second, Renaissance aesthetic forms are restaged and reworked (such as classic paintings in *Caravaggio*, Shakespearean sonnets in *The Angelic Conversation* and Renaissance masque in *Edward II*). Third and most important of all, unorthodox Renaissance discourses such as Neoplatonism, hermetism, and alchemy are evoked as major sources of counter-memories in order to fight against homophobic ideology (Ellis 1999: 191).

Furthermore, Ellis elaborates on the influence of Frances A. Yates's *Art of Memory* on Jarman, and through his reading of Marsilio Ficino and Giordano Bruno in the book, we have a general understanding of the significance of the occult philosophy and its relationship to Jarman whether in terms of sexual, political and social liberation or in terms of filmic, aesthetic and philosophical concerns. It is a philosophy that acknowledges male same-sex desire and celebrates interconnectedness among things and diversity of creation. Thus, he concludes, "The Renaissance art of memory becomes for him a way of activating counter-memories and sites of non-belonging to the phallogocentric order (to recall Braidott's formulation). At the same time, Jarman finds in the alchemists and the practice of magic a way of imagining his own artistic community, a tradition of gay filmmaking that includes Eisenstein, Cocteau, Genet, and Anger" (Ellis 1999: 297). Thus, Ellis demonstrates the importance of the unorthodox Renaissance discourse, that is, the Renaissance art of memory, in Jarman's work.

However, even though critics have found out how intriguingly complex it is that Jarman's works get involved with alchemy or the Renaissance art of memory, they have not probed into the aspect that since the sixteenth century the popular alchemical treatises have taken the form of emblems consisting of the motto or epigram, a poem and the picture, in which mythological figures or the story convey alchemical knowledge (Jones 1995: 62). Peggy Munoz Simonds in her

study also indicates the close relationship between the Egyptian and Greek mythology and alchemical secrets in the works and treatise written by (or attributed to) Stanislas Klossowski de Rola, R. Bostocke, and Michael Maier (Simonds 1998: 134–5). If alchemy or Renaissance occult philosophy is the alternative discourse that Jarman deploys to activate counter-memories, and form his imaginative community, then what about his attitude toward mythology and how is he engaged himself with re-writing/re-figuring the alchemical images that are at the same time embedded within problems of historiography?

That is to say, in a move to counter-memory, those mythological figures on emblems about alchemical treatises or magic images of the stars used in Giordano Bruno's memory system would have to also bring upon themselves Jarman's contemporary issues (such as sexual freedom and historiography) since queer period films are for the present and insistently refer to the present. Just like Caravaggio is "the first Italian painter to depict street people on religious canvas" (Jarman 1993: 24), Jarman certainly does not merely imitate those visual representations from emblem books. So, we need to face up to the difficult question such as how exactly does Jarman "do" with myths in order to both resist a segregating ideology and contrive a network of artistic community which may even "transcend" any kind of identity politics.⁵ To answer the question we have to look at Daniel O'Quinn's essay.

II. Quotation, Allegory and "Inspired Melancholy"

In discussing Derek Jarman's journals or diaries that accompany his filmmaking, Daniel O'Quinn quotes from Neil Hertz to elucidate his views on Jarman's method of writing as one that "'consists in more or less violent fragmentation of literary bodies into 'quotations,' in the

⁵ Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit make a very impressive analysis of *Caravaggio*. They assert that even though without an obvious agenda of queer politics like *The Garden* (1990), *Caravaggio* touches on the issue of identity that is even more of ontological dignity. "Identities are never individual; homosexual desire is a reaching out toward an *other sameness*. Homosexuality expresses a homoness that vastly exceeds it but that is none the less the privilege, and the responsibility, of making visible" (Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit 1999: 80–81).

interest of building up a discourse of his own ...” (O’Quinn 1999: 113). O’Quinn specifies that this concept of “quotation” reminds him of Walter Benjamin’s definition of it, ““Quotations in /his/ works are like robbers by the road side who make an armed attack and relieve an idler of his convictions”” (ib. 114). This insight into Jarman’s writing style can help us understand Jarman’s uses of anachronism and his intriguing ways of mingling and combinations of images. This sharp sense of opposing forces (Benjamin’s dialectics as a “stand-still”) and the irretrievable gap or sense of loss is what accounts for his queer art of memory as historiographic principles to activate counter-memories. This gap and sense of loss is what makes Jarman’s historiography or his method of dealing with cultural heritage both personal and unique. Like Walter Benjamin’s definition of quotation and his concept of allegory, Jarman’s method and philosophy of historiography is a “melancholic science.”

Here, I would like to build up /articulate the connection between Benjamin’s concept of allegory with the idea of “inspired melancholy.” The link between them lies in the role played by the process of profanation or mortification. While analyzing Benjamin’s concept of allegory, Susan A. Handelman points out that for Benjamin allegory, unlike symbol in which there is momentary and total apprehension, reveals the dialectical image at a standstill the moment when past and present flashes into each other. This is where materialism meets theology. She then proceeds to proclaim,

This defense of allegory was a move away from the pseudotheology of the romantic symbol toward materialism, and toward the definition of a different kind of redemption, ‘profane’ theology. Allegory would be a model of the salvation of phenomena by means of their very profanation. (Handelman 1991: 125)

Thus, the road to profanation/mortification is the road to salvation. I think Benjamin’s definition of allegory and Handelman’s precise explication of it can help us “see through” the philosophical concerns supporting the way how Jarman does with such cultural heritage as the myth of Bacchus.

In talking about how profanation or mortification of the works could be the way to salvation, Handelman highlights the importance of

gazing, "The gaze of the allegorist (or the critic who 'mortifies works') is a *melancholy* one which *strips, drains, and empties the innate life of the object* to the point where, unlike the symbol, it can no longer have meaning of its own" (ib. 127–128, emphasis added). This description is strikingly similar to the alchemical process called *nigredo*:

the initial, black stage of the opus alchymicum in which the body of the impure metal, the matter for the Stone, or the old outmode state of being is killed, putrefied and dissolved into the original substance of creation, the *prima materia*, in order that it may be renovated and reborn in a new form. The alchemists, along with popular seventeenth-century belief, held that there could be no regeneration without corruption. (Abraham 1998: 135)

From the initial, black stage to the melancholy gaze of an allegorist, materials/object/history has gone through a process of transmutation that aspires for regeneration.

Thus, we may come to the argument that this melancholy gaze is not a pathological one but a productive one. This is a gaze issued by the "inspired melancholy" coined by Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl whose joint research in German first puts forward the interpretation of Albrecht Dürer's *Melancholia I* (1514) as a representation of "inspired melancholy". It is also discussed in Panofsky's *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer* and further expounded in a 1964 book entitled *Saturn and Melancholy* by Klincksieck, Panofsky and Saxl (Yates 1979: 59). Even though both Frances A. Yates and Panofsky trace the formation of human body's four humors back to the Galenic psychology and point out people's change of attitude toward the once despised humor may be brought about under the influence of a Pseudo-Aristotelian treatise, *Problemata Physica*, Yates succinctly proposes that it is Henry Cornelius Agrippa (and his *On Occult Philosophy* (1533)) that plays a direct and major part as an influential figure to Dürer, rather than Marsilio Ficino (Yates 1979: 61–2). Since Yates' agenda here is to elaborate on how Renaissance occult philosophy and especially Agrippa's *On Occult Philosophy* would facilitate people's change of attitude toward melancholy, this (debatable) assertion could be accepted in our discussion for now.

Yates clearly makes the point that Agrippa's occult philosophy includes the two major aspects of Neo-Platonism, namely hermeti-

cism and Cabala. But *Saturn and Melancholy* dismisses the Hermetic and magical thought of Ficinian Neoplatonism and the Cabalistic magic introduced by Pico (ib. 65). She then concludes, "it was the exciting thought of a religion made stronger by hermetic and Cabalistic magic which reached Dürer through the influence of Reuchlin and Agrippa in his environment" (ib.). Thus the revaluation of melancholy humor and the theory of inspired melancholy derived from it amount to the belief that melancholy is the temperament for inspiration which belongs to the atmosphere of the Renaissance occult philosophy.

III. The Dismemberment of Dionysus Revived

After a long diversion away from the discussion on Dionysus (Bacchus), it is Agrippa's *On Occult Philosophy* that leads us back to this wine-god. There are three books in *On Occult Philosophy*: the first is on magic which concerned with operating on the elemental world; the second book is on celestial magic which is concerned with operating on the middle world of the stars; the third book is devoted to the supercelestial world.

In Book I there is a chapter entitled "Of madness, and divinations which are made when men are awake, and of the power of a melancholy humour, by which spirits are sometimes induced into men's bodies". Agrippa mentioned (Pseudo-)Aristotle on the subject of melancholy humour and divine frenzy. He states, "melancholy men, by reason of their earnestness, do far better conjecture, and quickly conceive a habit, and most easily receive an impression of the celestials. And in his problems saith, that the sibyls and the Bacchides, and *Niceratus* the Syracusan, and *Amons* were by their natural melancholy complexion prophets, and poets" (Agrippa 2000: 188). We know that Bacchides are the priestesses of Bacchus, who with wine and dancing worked themselves into a frenzy at the festivals of the wine-god. They are also the women who tore Orpheus into pieces. Besides this "natural melancholy complexion" that is an ingredient for prophesy and poetry writing, another key point is that the dismemberment suffered by Dionysus and Orpheus actually facilitates the tragicomic cycle of life, death, and rebirth within nature, a process of metamorphosis.

This is why "Of the number four, and the scale thereof" in book Two calls for our attention. Agrippa tells that "there are also four kinds

of divine furies, proceeding from several deities, viz. from the Muses, Dionysus, Apollo and Venus" (Agrippa 2000: 255). According to the footnote, the divine inspired madness of Dionysus was the "murderous fury of the Bacchides" (ib. 261). Also in this book, Agrippa explains four kinds of divine phrensy (frenzy) also proceeding from the Muses, Dionysus, Apollo and Venus (ib. 618–620). And a further explanation of the second kind of divine phrensy from Dionysus is as followed,

this doth by expirations exterior, and interior, and by conjurations, by mysteries. By solemnities, rites, temples, and observations divert the soul into the mind, the supreme part of itself, and makes it a fit and pure temple of the gods, in which the divine spirits may dwell, which the soul then possessing as the associates of life, is filled by them with felicity, wisdom, and oracles,...". (Ib. 621)

Thus, we have a general picture of how the wine-god actually is a key figure in *elevating and transforming* melancholy humour even though the divine inspired madness of Dionysus or the "murderous fury of the Bacchides" is violent and destructive, the trace that shows one of the double nature of wine and the wine-god. The double nature of wine and the wine-god here is presented by divine furies and divine frenzy.

There's a further important feature about Dionysus related to knowledge of alchemy. Dionysus, together with Sol, Adonais, and Osiris, refers to the philosophical Sun, and thus to the expression of both sexes, the alchemical hermaphrodite (Peggy Munoz Simonds 1998: 140). The dismemberment of Dionysus, and Dionysus as the alchemical sun are very much related to our queer reading of *Caravaggio*, exemplified by the sequences of *The Entombment of Christ* (1602–04). I think Dionysus' dismemberment and hermaphroditism converge to a nodal point where issues such as artistic creation and gender identity are so implicated that regeneration and re-conceptualization of them is activated and possible. That is, this nodal point forges a curious link between Bacchus/the Bacchides and a philosopher-allegorist with a melancholy gaze.

Intriguingly, Jarman in the film script of *Caravaggio* claims, "To save you, we'll have to adopt your methods" (Jarman 1986: 34). What does he mean by adopting "your method"? What method? Does it refer

to artistic techniques? Or is it something that combines material, physical, spiritual, magical, and philosophical dimensions?⁶ Just like Benjamin's project for the philosopher-allegorist, to redeem history requires a "nonsubjective memory, emanating from a realm rather than active personal cognition or chronological narrations of past events" (Handelman 1991: 152), Jarman's melancholy gaze at Caravaggio and his paintings probes into a timeless zone that oscillates between past and present, life and death, a prolonged death.

In the movie, except *Bacchus* (1596 or 1596–7) painting, Caravaggio's early paintings with the Bacchic theme such as *Boy with a Bunch of Grapes* (or the *Sick Little Bacchus*), *Concert of Youths*, or *Boy with a Basket of Fruit* are mostly staged in the story about Caravaggio and his relationship with his patron, Cardinal Francesco Maria Del Monte. The only allusion to the Uffizi *Bacchus* is in Michele's voice over,

I build my world as Divine Mystery, found the gods in the wine, and took him to my heart –I painted myself as Bacchus and took on his fate, a wild orgiastic dismemberment. I raise the fragile glass and drink to you, my audience, 'Man's character is his fate'. (Jarman 1986: 21)

"My audience" here in this voice-over refers both to the audience of Caravaggio, the painter, and Jarman, the filmmaker. And the "orgiastic dismemberment" relates both to Dionysian legendary of his death and the ritual ceremony to celebrate the coming of spring and his resurrection. And in that fragile glass is the wine that both liberates and destroys. It, of course, refers to Dionysian divine fury, the murderous fury of the Bacchides. Moreover, the ambivalent meaning released from the wine is blood, Michele and Rannucio's blood, and most significantly Jesus Christ's blood. As Justine Martyr observes, concerning the Eucharist symbols, the miracle of the wine makes strong connections between Christian legend and that of Dionysus (Jung 1967: 401). The tricky part, however, is that Dionysus and Christ are all related and

⁶ In explaining why the language of dreams and visions is such an appropriate vehicle to carry knowledge of alchemy, Cherry Gilchrist proposes that it is because dreams and visions contain physical, emotional, and spiritual levels of meanings simultaneously (Gilchrist 1991: 27).

connected to the painter, Michele. The three of them seem to form a kind of hypostatic relation; Michele becomes the incarnation of Christ and Christ that of Dionysus.

So, I think, the (unseen) Uffizi *Bachuss* paradoxically plays a significant role as a link or passage to the Renaissance occult thoughts about Dionysus and inspired melancholy, and to Christianity about Jesus Christ's sacrifice for human beings. That is to say, the Uffizi *Bachuss* somehow is more like an intermediary catalyst that eventually unleashes the hidden relationship between the sacred and the profane. Since Jarman manipulates cultural artifacts/heritage as an allegorist, he would want to mortify and thus pull down the gods from alters/stars.

All these complicated layers of meanings are illuminated by the very last filmic sequences involving a tableau vivant of *The Entombment of Christ*. There are three scenes interlocking with one another, including Caravaggio's final deathbed in Porto Ercole, an Easter procession with young Michele and Pasqualone (young Michele's companion and lover), and inside a tent where a tableau vivant of *The Entombment of Christ* (with Caravaggio's "reincarnation" as Jesus Christ in it) is staged with Michele and Pasqualone watching.

Because of the tableau vivant that shows Caravaggio's paintings, the inter-cutting (editing) of sequences of scenes and the camera movement which reveals figure/character relation, Caravaggio's drawing room, the alchemist's "laboratory" and Jarman's shooting "studio" thus work analogically together to create hermetic transformations of "objects" on screen, objects which are personal/ cultural memories.

To name some of these ambivalent layers of meanings, they include libido for an incestuous relationship so as to be born again like the sun god, Eros and Thanatos, the dual nature of life and art, and hermaproditism (see Jung 1967; Simonds 1998). To retrieve or balance these two opposite forces, one needs to penetrate into the depth of our psyche within which the emotional, the corporeal and the spiritual reside. That's why there is a bunch of red poppies held by Pasqualone.⁷ Red poppies are like psycho-pomp; they are to revive something lost and hidden. Red poppies appear in many of Jarman's movies, including *Imaging October* (1984), *Caravaggio* (1986), *The Last of England* (1987), *War Requiem* (1989) and *The Garden* (1990). The following is

⁷ This red refers to cinnabar, the result of the union of mercury (feminine) and sulfur (masculine). See Elkins (1999: 103).

a poem written by Jarman as the voice-over read by Tilda Swinton in *The Garden* (1991).

Scarlet poppies
This is a poppy
A flower of cornfield and wasteland
Bloody red
Sepals two
Soon falling
Petals four
Stamens many
Stigma rayed
Many seeded
For sprinkling on bread
The Staff of life
Women in wreaths
In memory of the dead
Bringer of dreams
And sweet forgetfulness.

(Jarman 1992: 8–9)

If somehow we all need myths in order to remember, we need to find a more innovative way to revive mythology (“innovative” in terms of creativity, not necessarily in terms of technology). So, we will not fall into the trap of perpetuating the dominant and oppressive belief systems. I think Jarman, with a melancholy gaze upon personal/ cultural memories, the object to be mortified, had always worked hard to walk on this lonely path to come to terms with his role as an artists, filmmaker and allegorist in the sense of Walter Benjamin’s definition.

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Tópicos del Seminario. 17. Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla. 2007. ISSN 165-1200. (Dir. María Isabel Filinich). Under the title "Pasajes" it contains articles in Spanish by C. González Ochoa, S. A. C. Rodríguez, E. Arnoux and M. I. Blanco, R. Mier, T. Carbó.

Tópicos del Seminario. 18. Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla. 2007. ISSN 165-1200. (Dir. María Isabel Filinich). Under the title "Significación y negatividad" it contains articles in Spanish by F.

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Traditionnel, indentité, modernité dans les cultures du Sud-Est européen: la littérature, les arts et la vie intellectuelle au XXe siècle. (Eds. Roumiana L. Stanchéva, Alain Vuillemin). Sofia – Arras: Institut d'Études Balkaniques, Artois Presses Université, 2007. 367 pp. ISBN 978-954-91085-7-6, 978-2-84832-064-9. It contains a great number of articles in French and English by Bulgarian and international scholars about different aspects of Balkan literature and culture.

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